

Screen

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Analysis and film theory

Absorption and theatricality in cinema

***Sans soleil* and the mise-en-scene of desire**

***News from Home* and affective space**

***Breaking the Waves* and 'the female spectator'**

Norman King 1939–2004

It is with much regret
that the editors of *Screen*
announce the death at the age of 65
of their friend and colleague
Norman King

Norman had a long association
with both *Screen* and the
Society for Education in Film and Television

He was a member of the
Executive Committee of SEFT
during the 1980s and was
closely involved in the relocation
of *Screen* to Glasgow in 1990

He was an editor of *Screen*
from 1990 until 2000, and continued as
a member of the Editorial Board

**This issue of the journal
is dedicated to his memory**

'Wandering with precision': contamination and the mise-en-scene of desire in Chris Marker's *Sans soleil*¹

BURLIN BARR

Vertigo and impossible possession

1 I borrow the phrase 'wandering with precision' from Raymond Bellour's discussion of *Sans soleil* in 'Zapping zone', in *Passages de l'image*, trans. James Eddy (Barcelona: Fundació Caixa de Pensions, 1991).

Perhaps the most provocative section of Chris Marker's *Sans soleil* (France, 1982) has its setting in no particular location or time, but in another film – Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (USA, 1958). The sequence from Marker's film is decidedly intertextual and its qualities of mise-en-abyme constitute only one of many ways that this film ponders its own motives and design. *Sans soleil*'s principal character – though this is at best an unstable term in the context of this film – Sandor Krasna, visits San Francisco where he follows the trail of Scottie (Jimmy Stewart's character in *Vertigo*). Krasna's detective work, an attempt to visit the empirical origins of the film *Vertigo*, inevitably reminds us of Scottie's frenetic detective work to uncover the concrete origins of his own fantasies (fantasies of the character Madeleine, played by Kim Novak). The narrator of *Sans soleil* states:

In San Francisco he had made his pilgrimage to all the film's locations. The florist where James Stewart spied on Kim Novak.... The tiles hadn't changed. He had driven up and down the hills of San Francisco where Jimmy Stewart, Scottie, follows Kim Novak, Madeleine.²

2 All textual excerpts are transcribed from Chris Marker, *Sans soleil* (New Yorker Films, 1982). For a useful, but incomplete, transcription of the film, see also Chris Marker, 'Sunless', *Semiotexte*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1984), pp. 33–40.

3 Based on stills of Scottie looking offscreen. Scottie, in effect, looks from one film into another, a distinctly intertextual visual pattern that emerges several times throughout the film.

The cinematic practice of this sequence is of as much importance as its narrative pretext. The sequence places stilled images from *Vertigo* next to moving images of the same locations as Krasna visits them. The impression of a search, and of its putative success, is rendered especially well by this juxtaposition: one sees the still and then finds its moving match. The strong graphic matching and implied eyeline matching³ between the two different types of imaging evoke very different – and unbridgeable – connotations of presence. This play between different kinds of imaging ultimately provides a formal enactment of the impossible searches that Krasna and Scottie undertake, as the moving images and stills assume a relation best described as aporetic. In each case, although these searchers uncover telling facts, traces and presences which begin to profile the object of their attentions, they are ultimately confronted with the ungraspable, as they approach an objective sedimented within interfering structures of memory, longing, fascination and desire. What they try to profile, to describe, to own, or to find the boundaries of, ultimately can be only memorialized.

The film presents itself, in part, as a series of letters, and this sequence relating to *Vertigo* begins with an assertion read from one such letter composed by Krasna. As is the case throughout the film, this assertion is spoken by a narrator, the film's primary voice; it is important to note that we never hear Krasna speak. All of his statements are mediated by a voice of ambiguous characterization, at once maternal, intimate, distant, reassuring, mesmerizing and commanding. With this voice – both remote and palpably sexual – the film folds an intense acoustic presence into its narrated commentary, and thereby further enacts the impossibility of possession (the voice never finds a body). The sequence on *Vertigo* begins: 'He wrote me that only one film had been capable of portraying impossible memory, insane memory. Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*'. As if to explain this statement, the narration proceeds through the marvellous and unruly act of viewing *Vertigo* in part as a documentary about 'tracking', as a paradigm for Krasna's own search for a correspondence between a screened (or projected) cinematic world and a literal place that one may physically inhabit.

He had followed all the trails, even to the cemetery at Mission Dolores where Madeleine had come to pray at the grave of a woman long since dead, whom she should not have known. He followed Madeleine, as Scottie had done, to the museum of the legion of honour, before the portrait of a dead woman she should not have known. . . . The small Victorian hotel where Madeleine disappeared had disappeared itself. Concrete had replaced it at the corner of Eddie and Gaul. On the other hand, the sequoia cut was still in Muir woods. On it Madeleine traced the short distance between two of

those concentric lines that measure the age of the tree, and said, 'Here I was born, and here I died'.

It should come as no surprise that this effort to locate conjunctions between virtual and material places requires visits to sites of memorialization: gravestones, museums, portraits and the calendar-like sequoia cut. Such sites appear to be the place of some success in this endeavour. They are touchstones, after all, constants bridging not only present and past but, in this case, worlds of fiction and fact. Here, in spite of their staying power, these sites point us in a direction that inspires little confidence. I rephrase a line from the narration to emphasize how this film portrays an impossible search: The small Victorian hotel where Madeleine disappeared had disappeared itself – replaced by 'concrete'. The 'concrete' has become a site of loss, of an absence of 'concrete' facts. By pointing out such extraordinary misalignments of perceptions, memories and facts, *Sans soleil* exposes the fallacy of a kind of detective work which adheres to a belief in a clear relation between perceptions, facts and a theory of facts. Again, from the voiceover of the same sequence:

He imagined Scottie as time's fool of love, finding it impossible to live with memory without falsifying it. Inventing a double for Madeleine in another dimension of time. A zone which would belong only to him, and from which he could decipher the indecipherable story that had begun at Golden Gate.

In addition to the sites of memorialization, we have the literally and figuratively mobile point of suture which goes by the familiar (and Proustian) name of Madeleine. Madeleine's appearances and disappearances aptly mark misalignments between histories and personal experience, and nowhere so tellingly as in the scene featuring her enigmatic confession before the sequoia cut. The different rings of the sequoia cut in *Vertigo* are captioned by such historical references as 'Magna Carta signed,' and 'Declaration of Independence'. Madeleine's statement ('Here I was born, and here I died') marks another history, perhaps a counterhistory but certainly a personal history, beneath the officially commemorated one. For Scottie, Madeleine signals a disturbance of memory: when he sees her, he is constantly reminded of something that he cannot place without undermining one of his own governing master narratives (note the repetition of the phrase 'whom she *should not* have known'). This is, as Krasna writes, 'impossible memory, insane memory' – memory that destroys history.

In the most general terms, Marker uncovers in *Vertigo* a story concerning the intrusion of vertigo – a state of both centredness and displacement – into configurations of stability and order. *Sans soleil* demonstrates how such mappable, empirical places as the gravestone, the florist, the historically-captioned sequoia cut and the 'concrete'

corner of Eddie and Gaul may be arranged into a constellation, but not necessarily an orienting one. Such concrete spaces may appear as facts but may also be zones of immemory and falsification. Marker repeats this story throughout *Sans soleil*, but the provenance of this film extends far beyond *Vertigo* and its physical/psychological settings as it ponders more generally the interplay between documentary investigation and lyric abstraction. The film, in fact, provocatively blurs the boundaries between these two poles. Krasna's (and Scottie's) object of desire and the object of his investigations, after all, are one and the same. Siting this film in numerous other texts, locations, times and cultures, Marker deploys vertigo as a kind of colouring, or litmus, to reveal commonplace components operative in western visions of cultural identity and of historical knowledge.

I begin this discussion of *Sans soleil* by turning to the *Vertigo* sequence because it so candidly confronts the intercourse between the empirical and the imaginary. *Sans soleil* insistently operates in these dual registers, pulling each into the other. To understand this imbrication, it is necessary to look at the film's prominent formal characteristics as they inflect its narrative pretexts. That is, as this film presents to us images of Krasna's travels through Japan, Africa and other locations, how is the film's clear preoccupation with cultural description influenced by its cinematic procedures? Through the depiction of Krasna's wanderings, this film's topographical montage of Japan, Africa, Iceland and San Francisco presents the spectator with a variety of cultural and textual terrains. The film resembles at times a documentary, a fiction and a work of ethnography, and it pulls material from film archives and contemporary mass media. Moreover, the film often addresses its viewers as if it occupied these textual positions unproblematically, asking its spectators to engage with its materials in the most familiar terms. Yet if we read this film according to traditional documentary procedures, or if we read it as a fictional film or as an ethnography, it presents us with extraordinary interpretive problems. What this film offers through its generic and disciplinary instability is an elucidation of the textual models by which spectators are taught to interpret material *as* cultural, *as* historical, *as* personal. I assert here that Marker presents a self-reflexive vision of cultural identity, one which frames the framer as it puts pressure on its own frequently totalizing cultural and historical descriptions. One result is a work inhabited by symptoms – symptoms prominently placed on display. A second result is that *Sans soleil* has emphases in all the unexpected places: overtly political or sociological statements may assume the valence of lyric expression; historical assertions may sound ironic; and markers of nostalgia take on a mantle of facticity. The film ambitiously offers a prolonged meditation on several master discourses – nation, culture and history. Most provocatively, the film frequently deploys such discourses and narratives as if they were stable significations – as unexamined components of a political unconscious. Yet in doing so,

the film reveals them to be fundamentally unstable significations. The clearest and simplest example of such a deployment can be found in the *Vertigo* sequence. Marker's emphasis on the scene involving the sequoia cut is especially telling in that it summons an official history ('Magna Carta signed', and so on), a history created with captions. In this scene, this history is not shown to be false, nor is it replaced by another history, but it becomes insufficient, and irrelevant, as it is eclipsed by a personal history.

Since the film brings about an imbrication of critical terrains, it is necessary to look at it through several different lenses and to assume several critical and political postures. While regarding the film's striking formal structuring, I discuss how the film alternates among three different kinds of textual address – all of which confront the possibility of the radical loss of self. The film assumes variously the stance of an ethnographic text, a travelogue and a lyrical reflection. Just as Madeleine's words hijack our vision of the sequoia cut, *Sans soleil* is frequently overtaken by textual grammars of the lyric, the ethnography or the travelogue. I would not say, however, that this film addictively accumulates texts and codes as a postmodern pastiche. Instead, the film shifts between texts to help reveal common and interfering strata in different kinds of textual production. As a result, when focusing on the film it is frequently impossible to see it with its own autonomous grammar. In this case, I assert that the film's orientation within hybrid or distressed genres enunciates, in ways purely expository procedures cannot, the interfering structures and misalignments which contribute to what this film calls a 'vertigo of space and time': the vertigo of time resulting from the eruption of nostalgia and personal memory into historical discourses, and the vertigo of space marked by the intrusion of the 'foreign' into spaces of sanctuary, and by the eruption of instability into spaces of presumed order and stability.

Yet, in discussing concepts of form and aesthetics one also must confront the work as an explicitly social text. To 'orient' means to place in a particular way with respect to the cardinal points of a compass or other defined data; to bring into defined relation to known facts or principles. Many viewers experience considerable difficulty as they try to find their orientations in this film, and I maintain that this disorientation has its own setting – the mise-en-scene in a film that faces to the east.

The ethnographic moment

Frame for frame, *Sans soleil* seems to be devoted above all to the task of cultural description – or at least cultural referencing – although I would suggest that 'cultural description' is a dominant conceit for the film rather than an actual goal. Marker adopts realist documentary or ethnodocumentary effects as readily as popular filmmakers may mimic

the style of melodrama or noir. Turning to cultural description as a conceit, rather than as a discipline or practice, opens up a range of political tensions specifically in the way the film blatantly summons notions of the exotic. In spite of the commonplace practice in numerous media of appropriating styles and commodity forms from different sources, incorporating ethnography as a *code* rather than as a paradigm or discipline troubles the cultural logic of this tactic of appropriation. Certainly most western audiences are familiar with texts – popular or not – characterized by the play of stylistic allusion or the widespread appropriation of images and styles. The face of a popular star can be reproduced and legibly read in a variety of media and texts. But how might one read, for example, an image wrested from the context of an ethnographic or documentary film, such as the face of a woman in the markets of Cape Verde? I do not imply by this question that ethnographic images do not already have broad circulation as popular images.⁴ *Sans soleil*, however, puts particular emphasis on portability – the portability of ethnographic images in particular – as it cannibalizes citations of otherness and problematically codes ‘apparent difference as manifest identity’.⁵ Many spectators of this film maintain that it indulges a sense of the exotic – which here includes reproducing a face as an image; citing culture as a non-specific entity with no social, political or historical context. In effect, this film – according to one critical stance – summons apparent difference as an affective structure.

I concur with this characterization, but not insofar as it leads to an obvious ideological end. That is, I am not convinced the film can be reduced to an obvious example of orientalist enframing and its attendant ideological configurations. Certainly, through images of Japan and Guinea Bissau, Marker deploys orientalist enframings and indulges what appears at first as an insistence on clearly delineated – though unexamined – cultural specificities. Krasna wanders through what seems to be a fantasy of Japan and of Africa as sites of the exotic in the form of practices, customs, commodity forms and, especially, images. But at the same time, the film documents the exotic as it is textually deployed; it documents a cultural phantasm as it is generated. And the film thereby investigates how the exotic is constituted. It asks what might constitute a cultural phantasm, and it ponders the role such a phantasm might play as an affective device. I suggest that this film references cultural specificity in order to ponder cultural contact. To this end, the film explores the contact of lyrical and documentary modes of address as they are deployed to describe a cultural encounter.

⁴ See Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), for a discussion of the history of ethnographic visualization in popular and scientific films.

⁵ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: the Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 175.

⁶ In this sense, the film participates in a broadened notion of siting as articulated and developed by many ‘critics and visual artists who treat conditions like desire or disease as sites for art’. *Sans soleil* is sited in numerous films and film types, and is also the site of a disorientation. For more on this point, see especially Foster, *The Return of the Real*, pp. 184ff. Also see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), ch. 1.

Given the extensive citation in this film from ethnodocumentary sources and the frequent deployment of some ethnodocumentary codes, it is necessary briefly to explore some of the parameters of this textual model. I turn to two sequences which depict – or at least are sited in⁶ – different cultural festivals. Both sequences are pointedly self-reflexive

in a way that calls attention to their processes of cultural documentation.

The first sequence is composed primarily of footage taken from a documentary entitled *Carnival in Bissau*. It features celebrants in a variety of costumes and masks representing humans and animals, living and dead. Many of the masks represent animal skulls and the narrator informs us (Marker's narrator, not a narrator from the original film; another distinctly intertextual moment) that these are animals resurrected from the dead and parading through the streets with the living. The footage from *Carnival in Bissau* is intercut with shots – presumably now from Marker's camera – which linger on desiccating carcasses of water buffalo at the edge of an expanding Sahara. This 'original' footage begins the sequence, and in what follows (cannibalized from the ethnographic film) we have no trouble identifying the skulls of water buffalo 'resurrected' and integrated into the carnival. In effect, Marker creates a simple montage that contextualizes and focuses our attention on particular images of the carnival. With this montage, we look into the documentary footage from *Carnival in Bissau* from a position aligned with Marker's non-documentary filmmaking. Along with the 'resurrected animals' in the celebration, we find a chimp attired in distinctly western shirt and trousers, and a man in whiteface, also dressed as a European in shirt and trousers, bearing a ridiculous-looking backpack (figure 1). This contrived backpack is itself a marvellous piece of costuming, as it pointedly calls to mind the portable apparatus of recording and/or transmission. It resembles a radio or an aspect of film production – part of the apparatus of the ethnographer or of a colonial authority. I take this to be a powerfully self-reflexive moment, yet another example of

Figure 1

A participant in a Bissau street festival wears a white mask and carries an improvised radio on his back. A moment of self-reflexivity and *mise-en-abyme*: the documentarist is not the only one representing the 'other'.

Sans soleil (Chris Marker, 1982).



how the film ponders its own methods and structures. Even these brief citations from ethnographic films bear some component of self-reflexivity, either subtle or blatant. In this case, representing the 'other' culture is not the sole domain of the European film crew, since the celebrants are shown making representations of the westerners.

The second sequence depicts the Japanese festival named Dondo-yaki. This festival follows a full month of celebrations which mark the new year. Here, Krasna finds an example of a public performance which mediates one's experience with loss.

And when all the celebrations are over, it remains only to pick up all the ornaments, all the accessories of the celebration, and by burning them, make a celebration. This is Dondo-yaki. A Shinto blessing of the debris that has a right to immortality.... Abandonment must be a feast, laceration must be a feast, and the farewell to all that one has lost, broken, used, must be ennobled by a ceremony.

The footage appears to be highly observational – a seemingly transparent documentary scene with no self-reflexive features. It shows a large number of people ceremoniously gathered around a large bonfire. Yet it includes its own self-reflexive turn (in the form of a voiceover) just as it concludes, when the presence of Krasna is implicitly revealed. We learn he has been asking questions and soliciting interpretations of the event all along. The narrator quotes Krasna directly: 'The only baffling part of this ritual was the circle of children striking the ground with their long poles. I only got one explanation.'

On the one hand, one could say that both of these sequences fathom different negotiations of a proper distance between the living and the dead. Especially considering that other sequences of the film dwell on similar subject matter, one could say that this is one of the film's governing *topoi* – a topic to which it relentlessly returns. Yet, if one moves beyond this critical orientation (without abandoning it altogether) one can see in the insistent self-reflexivity of these sequences that they also represent a changing distance between different cultures as they come into contact and as one represents the other. I am particularly struck by the way such reflections on death and loss are intricately linked with visions of cultural contact and absolute cultural specificity. Cultural relation is embedded in all of these sequences on death and survival. As the film broaches imponderable subjects broadly surrounding laceration, death and loss, why are they presented in ethnographic terms? I would suggest that this film invokes cultural difference not in order to explore it or attempt to understand it; rather, the film invokes it as a variety of lyric consolation. This is, needless to say, a deeply problematic textual procedure, but in this film it makes up a prolonged meditation on how such consolations are commonplace and are inscribed in a western political unconscious. Viewed together these clips offer the pretext of pursuing one objective,

while delving into another; they ask how to go about representing another culture and how to find the so-called proper distance for textual production. Death becomes a site or a *mise-en-scene* for staging cultural contact.

This brings us back to the parameters of ethnographic realism. Both of these sections initiate literary and cinematic procedures common to realist ethnographic description. Following James Clifford's analysis of ethnographic genres, the realist model in ethnographic description requires the depiction of a cultural 'tableau vivant designed to be seen from a single vantage point, that of writer and reader',⁷ a position which might be extended here to include participant-observer, camera and spectator. Such depictions involve regarding culture as a text, identifying 'representative' parts and selecting observations to yield a structure of a cultural whole.⁸ The sequences I have mentioned from *Sans soleil* consistently foreground individual acts, rituals, festivals and ceremonies against a more general background of Japanese or Bissau culture. Marker reproduces a commonplace textual logic in which parts act for wholes in order to invest the latter with a coherent structure. Additionally, the sequences I have mentioned emphasize shots of somewhat lengthy duration and simple composition, drawing the viewer's attention to the content of the shot rather than to the montage. These techniques assist in the establishment of a privileged, invisible and singular point of view: a place of protection, and even of sanctuary or consolation. One could say that these procedures and techniques comprise what Clifford calls an 'aesthetic purification' of the unruly process of participant observation.⁹ Marker's film ponders such aesthetic purification through deliberate formal choices, revealing what one might call a phantasm of the literary in even the most objective of texts. Instead of an aesthetic purification, we encounter aesthetic contamination. He posits deeply affective structures and a sense of lyric consolation as core components of western cultural visions.¹⁰

'What I want to show you are the neighbourhood celebrations', states the narrator at the beginning of one sequence, but along with the neighbourhood celebration we are also given an image of desire ('what I want to show...'). In this sequence the festival footage captures, one at a time, several dancers, and appears to be committed to documenting their movements and dress, as well as the percussive music of the festival. Yet one sustained shot lingers on the hands of a dancer long enough for the viewer to ask questions: What does Krasna see? Even allowing for the certainty that hand movements are a component of the dance, something else is happening – fascination has entered the scene (figure 2). The 'objective' distance has collapsed – distance in every sense of the word. It is no accident that this deliberately long take comes in the form of a closeup. The objective distance has been replaced by devotion to enigmatic and inexplicable content in the image – a devotion to detail itself. The images take on a doubleness in which sociological content and hermetic fascination are manifest within

⁷ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 53. For the most thorough discussion, to my knowledge, of textual models in ethnographic description, see George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: an Experimental Moment in Human Sciences* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1986).

⁸ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p. 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4ff.

¹⁰ I hesitate to indulge such a monolithic category. One problem with the term is that it elides any sense of specificity related to historical, political or economic relations. Yet it is especially notable that Krasna's itinerary places him in countries which emphasize vastly different forms of contact. At times the film explicitly summons notions of empire and postcoloniality with reference to Portugal and Cape Verde, Japan and Okinawa. But the film evokes other relations and pairings which require other models. If one views the film strictly in terms of, for example, empire and postcoloniality, then one has difficulty reading the images of San Francisco, Iceland and Japan. For this reason, I locate my discussion of the film in the realm of affect – cultural consolation standing in for lyric consolation. As I state later, lyric consolation deals fundamentally with the threat of self-dissolution.

Figure 2

The dancer's hands receive extended and, in some respects, excessive attention. The documentary impulse has been replaced with a lyric fascination.
Sans soleil (Chris Marker, 1982).



the same frame. We see a 'neighbourhood celebration' and an 'image of desire'. This festival sequence also offers the film's sole depiction of Krasna (or a close double) as it captures, *as part of the festival*, a cameraman bending towards and almost touching a dancer, in a proximity that can be seen as invasive, aggressive and perhaps erotic. Desire and drive have taken over the documentary aspect of the sequence at this point. In fact, the documentary quality of the film – as it skips from one festival, ritual or celebration to the next – instead of taking on a quality of breadth assumes a quality of relentlessness and drive. One is reminded of one of the earliest narrated statements of the film: 'I've been around the world several times and now only banality still interests me. On this trip, I've tracked it with the relentlessness of a bounty hunter. At dawn we'll be in Tokyo.' At the beginning of the film, the statement 'at dawn we'll be in Tokyo' strikes us as a mere statement of itinerary, but as the film proceeds we learn that Tokyo will be the object of a relentless search ('I've tracked it ...').

This film addresses, then, the intrusion of desire into fictions of neutral agency, and it does so by exposing the procedures and pressing the limits of realist documentary filmmaking. Throughout the film, numerous sequences remind us how a supposedly flat text may be shot through with repulsion, curiosity or pity as the look of the spectator becomes charged with different qualities. Again and again in the film a sense of objective distance is established and collapsed. Or, more accurately, even a sense of objective distance is revealed as an aesthetic tactic. Marker does not mask the fact that his gaze is tainted by – or even wholly formed by – a combination of intrusiveness, curiosity, pity and desire. In fact, he emphasizes this problem rather than attempting to hide it.

¹¹ I will not attempt to recapitulate here the rich investigations surrounding visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking. See David MacDougal, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); David MacDougal, 'Prospects of the ethnographic film', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods, Volume I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1976); David MacDougal, 'Beyond observational cinema', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods, Volume II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1985); Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Lucien Taylor (ed.), *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. 1990–1994* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994).

By foregrounding such aesthetic contaminations, these sequences do not merely exemplify cultural practices but speak of the ambivalences surrounding cultural intercourse. When I assert that the film initiates, but resists, closing a circuit of knowing (by introducing the familiar practices of realist documentary), I see this resistance as a means of obviating realist cultural depictions, precisely as a way of exposing and moving beyond one kind of picture-making that has reached a limit.¹¹ Rather than regarding these poetic tendencies as unavoidable and unfortunate effects underlying documentary depiction – as a contamination or subjective residue that cannot be overcome even with the best efforts – it is crucial to consider directly the contribution that lyric address can make to confronting the problems surrounding cultural depiction. That is, perhaps the lyric mode may not be merely an uncomfortable and inevitable limit, but an enabling one. Marker does not mask these lyric components, but turns to them as core components for depicting cultural contact. He shifts the focus from a depiction of cultural specificity to a meditation on cultural intercourse, including a confrontation – through a lyric address – with the possibility of self-dissolution.

I turn to one additional sequence (though numerous sections of the film could serve the purpose) that exemplifies this shift – from depicting a cultural object, to depicting contact, to insistently declaring a singular self in the face of an other. It begins with the pretext of showing the behaviours of a marginal Tokyo subculture, the Takenoko. The footage here is composed of shots of relatively long duration, allowing the spectator to focus on the dancers and the crowd that they attract, and not calling attention to cinematic or authorial craft. The voiceover states:

For the Takenoko, twenty is the age of retirement. They are baby Martians, I go see them dance every Sunday in the park at Yogi. They want people to look at them, but they don't seem to notice that people do. They live in a parallel time sphere, a kind of invisible aquarium wall separates them from the crowd they attract, and I can spend a whole afternoon contemplating the little Takenoko girl who is learning, no doubt for the first time, the customs of her planet. Beyond that, they wear dog tags, they obey a whistle, the Mafia rackets them, and with the exception of a single group made up of girls, it's always a boy who commands.

At first glance, this sequence of *Sans soleil* seems to be building on this well-established combination of a scientific and literary realist genre. The Takenoko – liminal though they are – appear as representative of their culture. This is, in fact, one of several sequences focused on marginal subcultures that together might be seen as an effort to determine the margins of a cultural object called 'Japan'. The concluding statements – cursory and totalizing as they are – can certainly be seen as an effort to draw broad cultural knowledge from a

carefully selected set of observations. But we also must come to terms with such statements as 'They are baby Martians', and the rapt attention Krasna gives to the Takenoko ('I can spend a whole afternoon contemplating the little Takenoko girl'). This conjunction further convinces me that we have been offered conceptual bait. If we read the Takenoko sequence as evidence of anything, we might refuse to treat the Takenoko as a cultural type and instead see the entire scene as representative of a kind of cultural window-shopping. 'They want people to look at them, but they don't seem to notice that people do.... A kind of invisible aquarium wall separates them from the crowd they attract.' More than showing us the Takenoko (a scene of ethnographic visualization), this sequence emphasizes a scene of desire and of enforced distanciation. The Takenoko 'want people to look at them' and they 'attract' a crowd. What constitutes this invisible aquarium wall? What kind of border is this and how is it maintained? This scene is a spectacle of wanting and displaced desire (displaced from the observer onto the Takenoko), in the guise of a detached and casual observer.

Embedded in the narrated statement concerning the Takenoko is another story, one that tells us how Krasna turns a series of casual street encounters into a search for a cultural object called 'Japan'. Krasna's vision of the world seems to be inflected by numerous positions: he is a *flâneur*, westerner, journalist, tourist, ethnographer and archivist, at times emphasizing one above the others. As a result we are forever questioning the status of the images he presents. What invests these images with value? What kind of value? Do these images make up a polemic? Are they purely aesthetic? Are they sociologically important? This shifting of positions serves to emphasize the film's concern with an expanded field of culture, the provenance of impossibly different specialisms. The film's enigmatic texture arises because it begs to be surveyed by a range of subject positions and disciplines, and it asks what makes cultural *exempla* of objects, events or groups. If this film leans on some codes from ethnographic disciplines, it also leans on ethnography's antithesis: sightseeing.

Travel and losing one's self

The importance of travel to this film cannot be underscored enough; especially since the film, according to its primary fiction, is composed of a series of letters and visual reports by a traveller. Yet as this film progresses, travel becomes less than self-explanatory. Krasna does not merely visit different places, but he obsessively travels. Travel is revealed as a pervasive practice: as a programmed sequence of ceremonies, discovery and celebration.¹² Travel becomes part of a discourse which defines cultural objects of knowledge, and which polices the borders of such definitions. In fact, Marker highlights those aspects of travel surrounding cultural commemoration: visiting

¹² For more on this topic, see Judith Adler, 'Origins of sightseeing', *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1989) pp. 7-29. For a remarkable extended discussion linking travel, self-discovery and national-cultural sites, see Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), ch. 2.

monuments, museums and shrines. Krasna visits sites that prompt recollection; they mark an event in space and time, thereby concerned more with cultural memory than with spatial location.

Much as *Vertigo* is one setting for the film, travel itself (rather than the actual places visited) becomes one of the film's primary sites. Following the brief opening and credit sequence, the film's first minutes introduce not only several locations but several varieties of dislocation. The narrator states:

He used to write me from Africa. He contrasted African time to European time. And also to Asian time. He said that in the nineteenth century mankind had come to terms with space, and that the great question of the twentieth was the coexistence of different types of time. By the way did you know that there were Emus on the Ile de France?

He wrote me that in the Bijago islands, it's the young girls who choose their fiancés. He wrote me that in the suburbs of Tokyo there is a temple consecrated to cats.

The images that accompany this voiceover constitute an equally restless montage. They include: a flamingo in a pool at sunset – a 'beautiful' vista; an emu; the face of a young woman, presumably of the Bijago islands; a succession of shots of a Japanese temple; small statues of cats. This unsettled and unsettling sequence ends in yet another location, the Cape Verde Islands, with shots of activities, commerce, faces, vendors and dock workers placed against the following statement:

He told me about the jetty on Fogo in the Cape Verde Islands. How long have they been there waiting for the boat? Patient as pebbles but ready to jump. They are a people of wanderers, of navigators, of world travellers.

In these early minutes, *Sans soleil* moves between locations with disconcerting ease. Nothing helps the viewer to make sense of this montage. Nothing appears to rescue this montage from offering a highly reductive treatment of people and place. In one sense, this quick succession of images and places visually levels the differences between the emu, the woman and the statues, disturbingly reducing them all to curiosities, or to commodities on display. The narration continues with disconcertingly totalizing statements:

They fashion themselves through cross-breeding here on these rocks the Portuguese used as marshalling yards for their colonies. A people of nothing. A people of emptiness. A vertical people. Frankly, have you ever heard of anything stupider than to say to people as they teach in film schools, not to look at the camera?

This kind of reduction corresponds to a sense of travel as a way to access culturally consumable objects. Rubbing against the grain of such

statements, however, are the different *modes* of dislocation beyond these assertions of place. Placed beside such assertions as 'I'm just back from Hokkaido, the northern Island' and 'At dawn we'll be in Tokyo' are statements which threaten the familiar containment of travel: 'I've been around the world several times and now only banality still interests me'. The film offers up putative, if fleeting, destinations and origins – a notion of an objective for travel, of place as an object of knowledge – only to declare an itinerary based on concept and anti-destination. Concrete places, times and subjects are at first offered as culturally consumable objects, invoking a sense of travel premised on an 'initial deficiency in the would-be tourist, to be fulfilled only through travel'.¹³ In these terms travel assures the conjunction of the subject with the announced destination – that is, 'at dawn we'll be in Tokyo' – which becomes the virtual point where the tourist realizes his fulfilment.¹⁴ But the film intercuts generic images of 'Japan' and 'Tokyo', something to discover and feel oriented by, with representations of place which upset this possibility of grounding. It calls upon, and then upsets, a practice in which self-discovery is articulated through a national-cultural object.

If travel towards a destination involves seeking out a reunification between the traveller and a 'valuable object', then anti-destination involves travelling without a valuable object in view. We have a meeting of two modes of travel which are actually two visions of the self: the first contributes to the perceptual creation of the earth as a continuous, lawfully regulated and empirically knowable secular terrain. One could say that the purpose of this mode of travel is to be lost and found.¹⁵ The second mode of travel – based on anti-destination – assumes a world in which one is never concretely oriented, and which one accesses only through wandering, unstructured observation and conjecture. 'It is often said', writes Judith Adler, 'that people travel to "see" the world, and assumed that travel knowledge is substantially gained through observation'.¹⁶ The observational quality of much of this film facilitates such codes of sightseeing, but by frequently calling attention to the apparatus of production (through the film's numerous examples of self-reference) the film unsettles this impression of a regulated and empirically knowable terrain. In place of an empirically knowable terrain, we encounter a set of changing discursive spaces. Most importantly, these two modes of travel that the film invokes represent two stances toward self-dissolution: the first disavows it, the second acknowledges it as a possibility or even a necessity. This tension is further explored in the film's deployment of what I refer to as a *lyric address*.

The lyric intrusion: losing one's voice

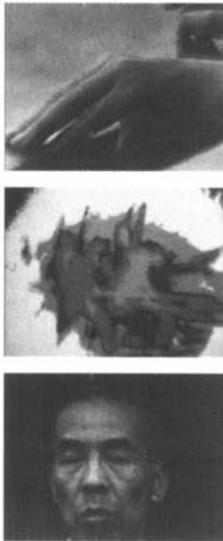
As I mentioned above, one festival sequence in the film offers a sustained shot of a dancer's hands, which invests the image with a

¹³ Jean-Didier Urbain, 'The tourist adventure and his images', *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1989), p. 111.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17. On the topic of accessing an empirically knowable terrain, one may be reminded also of Krasna's pilgrimage to San Francisco, to uncover the concrete locations of a cinematic and phantasmatic text.

¹⁶ Adler, 'Origins of sightseeing', p. 8.



Figures 3–5

Lyric affect intrudes upon and dominates the image-making: the hands of a passenger on a ferry; clashes of the 1960s electronically processed and rendered into pure shape and colour – stripped of historical or sociological specificity; a passenger dreams in a Tokyo subway train.

Sans soleil (Chris Marker, 1982).

sense of personal fascination and indirectly calls attention to the multiple fascinations that had marked the ‘objective’ footage. We are left not with a cultural scene, but a cultural *mise-en-scene* – a stage for displaying fascination. Other sections of the sequence replace the music of the celebration with a synthesized noise, calling attention to the textual construction of this scene. It is commonplace for the film to offer visual and acoustic features such as these that compete for our attention with its so-called documentary purpose. The spectator of this film is confronted with a phantasmagoria of images, many of which are marked by Krasna’s singular aesthetic and often nostalgic sentiment and many that appear to abandon all figuration. Moreover, the film incorporates numerous *image-sources*, including television and synthesized images, thereby also drawing on numerous and incongruent textual models and media (figures 3–5). It is particularly striking how *Sans soleil* moves through these different types of voicings, even how it threatens to lose itself in this excess – in a multitude of voices, forms and media. Yet, in the face of this fragmentation one frequently finds that this film is characterized as ‘elegiac’ or ‘lyric’. This contact of the lyric voice with a multitude of voices performs a distinct textual and cultural work in the way it enables this film’s highly peculiar rendering of cultural contact.

Using the term ‘lyric’ in conjunction with Marker’s film requires that one simultaneously consider two competing ideas:

- 1) the basic notion that a lyric mode is the product of a singular voice with a coherent set of affinities and affects; and
- 2) the understanding that voice does not imply self-presence, and that voicing may be the product of displacement, decentredness, ventriloquism, possession or influence.

I build here on statements several writers have made on this film. Raymond Bellour’s comments on *Sans soleil* offer an excellent entry into an understanding of this film’s conceptual restlessness, its passage through different modes of address and how these relate to the possibility of finding comfort through lyric contemplation. For Bellour, the lyric component of the film seems to be a given, but he especially emphasizes the film’s lyric sensibility as a necessary strand of an intellectual pursuit of the intangible, positing a possibly antinomous relation:

Sans soleil is inspired by a ... desire of intellection, between a vision of a future society and the relentless search for personal existence. How can we speak of what we love, say what moves us, what inspires, the pregnant instant experienced as a succession of threatened, but nevertheless intangible, images?¹⁷

It is crucial to note here that Bellour’s formulation relies on an interruption of the expository structure. His description of the film is transformed into an assessment of possibility (‘How can we

¹⁷ Raymond Bellour, ‘The double helix’, in *Passages de l’image*, p. 66.

speak of . . .?’). And through this interruption the notion of a lyric surfaces. Marker’s film for Bellour, then, is both a search for a personal existence and an interrogation of how we can speak of the conditions of that search. Bellour’s comment concisely describes the film, in dual terms which mark it with lyric coherence and which unsettle those features. No example better emphasizes this conjunction between lyrical affect and discursive inquiry than the second spoken sentence of the film, which concerns simple (almost home-movie) footage of children in Iceland: ‘He said that for him it was the image of happiness, and also that he had tried several times to link it with other images, but it never worked’. The affective and the discursive are placed into an interfering and indeterminate relation. This contact emerges throughout the film, again, in part, through its persistent self-reflexivity.

Marker’s particular variety of self-referentiality merits more attention at this point. The film is always posing questions about its construction, and this reflexive impulse competes for our attention with the putatively narrative or documentary components. The more common notion of self-referentiality ‘has been to make masterable a situation of potential excess and proliferation’,¹⁸ and this tendency to see self-reflexivity as a means of foreclosing broadened interpretations is easily aligned with the notion of textual unity. Self-referentiality frequently is

an organic, unifying force that closes off interpretation by making the [text] account for itself and stand free as a self-contained fusion of being and doing.¹⁹

But in this film we have an example of self-framing which has nothing to do with self-possession – this ‘fusion of being and doing’. Marker’s variety of self-referentiality offers instead ‘a turn that opens gaps and generates contradiction’.²⁰ As Krasna states at one point: ‘My personal problem was more specific: how to film the ladies of Bissau?

Apparently, the magical function of the eye was working against me there.’ These two varieties of self-reflexivity mirror the varieties of travel mentioned earlier – with their differing ways of acknowledging dissolution of the self. The ubiquitous self-questioning of *Sans soleil* yields no stabilized voice; neither the film, nor Krasna, finds a conjunction between a stable interior and an intelligible exterior. In fact, in light of the extensive intertextual sequences which characterize the film (how one sequence of a film peers into another), such self-questioning exacerbates the dilemma of speaking of an inside or outside as far as this text is concerned.

Numerous writers have begun to explicate the part played by intertextuality and self-referentiality in lyric address and the attendant transformative effects on our notion of coherent voicing.²¹ I argue, along with others, that it is best not to see the coexistence of different voicings effected by intertextuality and self-referentiality as impossibly contradictory or enigmatic, but to consider how we might regard them

¹⁸ Jonathan Culler, ‘Changes in the study of the lyric’, in Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (eds), *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ In addition to his article cited above, see also Jonathan Culler, ‘Lyric continuities: speaker and consciousness’, in *Neohelicon: Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1986), pp. 105–23; Barbara Johnson, ‘Apostrophe, animation, and abortion’, in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

²² Mary Jacobus, 'Apostrophe and lyric voice in *The Prelude*', in Hosek and Parker (eds), *Lyric Poetry*, pp. 169–70.

as 'eruptions of vertigo' which threaten self-possession. We may even regard such multiple voicings as indicators of a 'dread that poetic individuality may be lost'.²² The common association of lyric with singular subjectivity requires a suspension of disbelief in order to overlook the ruptures of apostrophe and other fragmenting effects pervasive in many lyric poems and other texts which may assume a lyric mantle. If we take such interruptions (effected for example by self-reference and intertextuality) as common components of lyric expression rather than as uncomfortable exceptions, we may come to consider lyric as a *mask*, as a way of confronting or engaging dissolution, dismemberment, 'loss of voice' and the threat to cultural singularity.

In their comments on *Sans soleil*, Jean-François Chevrier and Catherine David turn specifically to this topic. For Chevrier and David, as for Bellour, it is once again a given that the adjective 'lyric' best describes the behaviour of this film, and they pointedly assert:

There can be neither lyricism nor lyrical effectiveness in art today except in an experience with the otherness that reflects the conditions of 'modern life'.²³

If we follow the lead of this statement, lyricism *requires* the threat of dissolution. Similarly, lyric address perhaps best allows a range of representations of intrusion by 'the foreign' and, in fact, has frequently been the armature of a number of such representations under other guises. I suggest that just as *Sans soleil* borrows from and emulates documentary sources to create a 'documentary effect', we may also refer to the creation of a 'lyric effect'. The former puts pressure on realist textual strategies, while the latter offers a means of confronting components of a cultural imaginary imbricated in cultural description. Of course, numerous other nonfiction filmmakers engage their subject from the standpoint of documenting a construction, rather than documenting social reality, and unsettle the impulse which equates the look of the camera with certain knowledge. In such work, we encounter the production of visions which are automatically knowledge *and* enigma, or which are automatically projections of desire *and* ambivalence. Here, a lyric sensibility may appear as a symptom – even a totalizing or exoticizing one – yet also enable a new cultural picture. Perhaps the best summation of this possibility in *Sans soleil* comes once again in one of its references to *Vertigo*. Describing that film, the narrator quotes Krasna:

It seems to be a question of trailing, of enigma, of murder. But in truth it's a question of power and freedom. Of melancholy and dazzlement so carefully coded ... that you can miss it.

It is just this unexpected presence of 'questions of power' in 'melancholy and dazzlement' – their necessary appositional relation²⁴ – that the film unveils.

²⁴ It is worth emphasizing here how this formulation of the 'appositional relation' involves a turning away (*apo*) from a position or discourse and thereby enacts a combination of interruption and continuity.

Intervals of inner flight: Chantal Akerman's *News From Home*

MARIA WALSH

Red, black and grey – the image of a road, framed by sidewalks and reddish-brown brick buildings, appears in front of me. A car pulls out from a side street on the left and drives across the screen, exiting to the right. Another car pulls out from the kerb and drives into the foreground towards me, yet it does not seem to come closer. Cut to another image where a car appears from the forefront of the screen and drives off into the distance without losing its definition as a locus of interest in the static frame. A strange space is opening up, one that appears deep yet seems to flatten all that traverses it into abstract blocks of colour and light. Traffic, both human and mechanical, stratifies the surface of these blocks of colour and light, creating passages in which 'I' move, tracing lines and building up density, intensity in the image. Above the din of traffic, a woman's voice erupts offscreen: 'Dear Chantal', it says, 'When are you coming home? We miss you very much.'

Chantal Akerman's *News From Home* (1976) could be described as structured around absence. The ninety-minute imagetrack, comprising a series of mostly static shots of New York City, never shows the mother–daughter relationship alluded to in the letters that Akerman recites in voiceover – letters from her mother sent to Akerman during her stay in New York. Indeed, Stephen Heath, in his *Questions of Cinema*, reads the film in terms of absence. For him, the fact that the film neither sutures using a shot/reverse-shot sequence nor gives the spectator a character with which to identify emphasizes the 'central absence' on which the film's dislocations are constructed, that is:

1 Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), p. 99.

2 See Jennifer M. Barker, 'The feminine side of New York: travelogue, autobiography and architecture in *News From Home*', in Gwendolyn Audrey Foster (ed.), *Identity and Memory: the Films of Chantal Akerman* (Wiltshire: Flick Books, 1999), pp. 41–59. Barker's essay focuses on space and the city, but she gives a concise account of readings of Akerman's work in terms of the mother–daughter relationship. Janet Bergstrom explores Akerman's *œuvre* through psychoanalyst André Green's concept of 'the dead mother', linking this notion to second-generation Holocaust survivors and Akerman's relationship to her real-life mother. See 'Chantal Akerman: splitting', in Janet Bergstrom (ed.), *Endless Night: Cinema, Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 273–90.

the absence of the daughter, differently posited on image and sound tracks. From that absence, the film refuses to suture . . . to fix a unity. . . . Or rather, it refinds suture effectively as a term of the logic of the signifier, poses the problem of the relations in the imaginary; in which problem lies the real of the film, that of feminism, and of film, that of image, voice, noise, duration, rhythm, the impossible question of a woman's desire in all that.¹

Akerman's use of her mother's letters highlights the specifically feminine address of the film. However, feminist-influenced readings of *News from Home* tend to impose a narrative on the film that imprisons it in a stereotypical psychoanalytic interpretation based around the dichotomy of intimacy and claustrophobia characteristic of the mother–daughter relationship.² This narrativizable identification locks the film into predictable interpretations of loss and separation, inhibiting the possibility that *News from Home* may be generative of positionalities of subjective engagement that are not bound by such familial tropes. Rather than rushing to read the film in terms of autobiographical impulses and identifications, I should like to maintain Heath's emphasis on absence, but read it differently as generating affective movements or sensations that carry the viewer away rather than signifying the 'impossible question of a woman's desire'. In order to develop this idea I shall turn to the writings of Gilles Deleuze. Using a Deleuzian framework, *News from Home*, viewed from the perspective of 2004, answers Heath's 'impossible question of a woman's desire' with the actuality of affective sensations whose movement liberates the spectator from the constraints of identification.

Heath's reading is, of course, indebted to the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that dominated certain strands of 1970s and 1980s film theory. According to that body of theory, subjectivity is



News From Home
(Chantal Akerman, 1976).
Picture courtesy: British Film Institute.

3 Interpretations of this account of female desire sometimes infer, therefore, that female desire is outside dominant language, hence the emphasis on the 'poetic' in so-called feminine writing. For a psychoanalytic account of the stakes involved in this interpretation, see Juliet Mitchell's and Jacqueline Rose's introductions to *Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne: Feminine Sexuality* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982). For an account of feminine cinematic writing, see Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (New York, NY and London: Verso, 1994), especially pp. 12–13, 161–71.

4 There are numerous examples of work by feminist film theorists which attempt to articulate a positive subject position for the female spectator and positive readings of onscreen women. See Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1991); Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).

5 Affect is stressed in recent film studies. For example Lesley Stern in *The Scorsese Connection* (London: British Film Institute, 1995) foregrounds colour and form in Scorsese's work and the other films she analyzes. There is, however, always a character and a well-developed storyline to return to.

6 Gill Addison, 'Chantal Akerman: a conversation with the maker of *The Captive*', *filmwaves*, no. 14 (2001), pp. 24.

7 Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis and Affect*, trans. Douglas Brick et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 80. The quote in parenthesis is from Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977).

8 André Green, *The Fabric of Affect in the Psychoanalytic Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1999).

founded on a fundamental absence or lack. In patriarchal culture, because the image of woman is used to represent the lack in desire in general, female desire is thereby structured around a double absence from itself.³ Needless to say, this is not a very popular conception of the female subject and much work by feminist film practitioners and theorists has been done to counter its negativity.⁴ However, such work tends to centre on narratives based on female protagonists and relationships, the emphasis being on positive images and readings of woman on film. Less attention has been paid to the capacity of film images to move the spectator emotionally, regardless of whether what is being shown on screen can be read in terms of a positive, enabling representation or can be read against the grain to produce a productive reading of female subjectivity.⁵ It is my contention here that quite abstract film images can be emotionally moving – literally, that they can transport the viewer to a purely affective space. In a recent interview, Akerman refers to the relation between abstraction and emotional tension. Asked about the influence of structuralist filmmakers on her work, she responds by saying that

I think I am more emotional than Michael Snow. His work was more purely experimental and not so emotional, but with Jonas Mekas it's something else. So it was liberating. I understood that in a way with true abstraction you can build a tension as strong, as emotional, as some Hitchcock movies, and that was liberating.⁶

While Akerman's work has become increasingly narrative, culminating in her recent adaptation of Marcel Proust's *La Prisonnière/The Captive* (2001), I am interested in how *News from Home*, by means of its abstract qualities and camera framing, offers a glimpse of the unbound differences that exist in tandem with, but are overshadowed by, our passionate attachments to identity. The trajectory of *News from Home* stages this possibility that our sensibilities can be momentarily opened onto something new rather than repeating something archaic. As I shall describe, the film images a space without content, which allows the spectator the time and space to traverse the unbound sensations of pure affect, or what Deleuze calls the flow of becoming.

Heath does not mention affect at all. Its absence in his analysis relates, as I have stated, to the semiotic emphasis in 1970s and 1980s film theory. This emphasis was influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, in which it is not affect as such that matters, but 'the affect as it is "transmitted by language" ... that is, as it makes itself recognized in the transcendent exteriority of representation'.⁷ According to psychoanalyst André Green, affect is caught, in psychoanalytic theory, between its chaining up in discourse and the breaking of the chain.⁸ The breaking of the chain is considered traumatic, requiring the binding effect of discourse to translate the gaps

opened up by this rupture. In theories of representation that apply this model of oscillation between discourse and its rupture, such as Heath's use of suture, absence can be read as a distanciation strategy that has the potential to unhinge the spectator from her ability to perform the chaining, stitching effect of narrative. It acts as a resistance to the mobilizing of narrative desire. However, Heath's notion that absence in *News from Home* can only generate a rupture that overwhelms or suspends discourse, posing an unanswerable question, not only contradicts Akerman's insistence on *la jouissance du voir* but is contrary to the transformative effect that the film had on me.⁹

This transformative effect occurs in the final sequence of the ninety-minute film, although it should be said that the effect of this final sequence only works because of, and in conjunction with, the accumulated density of the preceding seventy minutes. In the final sequence, the camera, mounted on the Staten Island ferry, pulls away from the city and reframes the horizon, the New York skyline, in a lengthy sequence that ends with the end of the reel. This sequence capitalizes on the tension that has been built up throughout the course of the film by its irregularly paced, mainly static shots. The accumulation and accretion of shots creates a dual sensibility: a numbness that is obviated in the beginning by the emotional content of the mother's letters, and a diffuse mobile gaze for the spectator induced by the randomness and erratic duration of the shots. The wandering of this free-floating gaze through details in the image somewhat counteracts the weight of accumulation, that is, the sense that here again is another shot of traffic, another shot of dilapidated buildings or anonymous passersby. Akerman's *caméra fixe* is a phenomenon of strange proportion, being an immobile stare yet allowing us to move distractedly within the shot, scanning its surface details, wandering aimlessly over the shapes, colours and objects. Finding nothing in the image that correlates with the soundtrack, one gives up looking for coincidence and in fact, as the film progresses, the noise of the city all but drowns out the repetitive phrases of the mother's letters, releasing the addressee from their supplications.

News from Home is a filmic kind of *flânerie*, but unlike that masculinist discourse, where the *flâneur*'s vision is both possessed by and possesses the city, here the gazer becomes more and more absorbed by the image of the city.¹⁰ This absorption displaces the viewer from a position of possessive mastery, creating instead a hypnotic dream space which is intensified in the final sequence of the film, during which the viewer is carried away in the flux of a series of sensations that are fluid, scintillating, and with no aim beyond movement. Akerman's narrative camera leads us into this sensory space, a space freed from the mournful nostalgia for and of home and the rootless vagaries of nomadism. What happens in this final sequence?

⁹ Chantal Akerman, in Helena Reckitt (ed.), *Art and Feminism* (New York, NY and London: Phaidon, 2001), p. 217.

¹⁰ For a number of concise accounts of the discourse of the *flâneur*, see Keith Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994).

Moving away from home: transported to a new space

A subtle shift in register occurs near the end of the film with the introduction of a lengthy tracking sequence as the camera, positioned in an offscreen car, travels down Tenth Avenue, its stop–go progress subject to the changing traffic lights. This tracking sequence is followed by a sequence shot in the subway, but, rather than remaining underground as in previous subway sequences, the subway car thunders out of a tunnel and overlooks the city, framing its dilapidated buildings in a series of striking bird’s-eye views. Then, the penultimate shift in means of transport occurs, the camera is back on a car and we are placed in front of the oncoming traffic, the densely populated lines of vehicles seeming to sail along the New York thoroughfare. At this point the letters are still being read, although they have become less audible, the recitation of the mother’s words drowning in a sea of noise. Suddenly the film cuts to a shot of an undefined dark space, the only part of the film without the coordinates of a horizon line. Some lights are visible and, as the camera pulls back, you begin to recognize the underside of a bridge. You hear water lapping before it appears in the forefront of the screen. The camera pans along the buildings on the shore and then pulls away as the city’s skyline is gradually redefined by the offscreen movement of a withdrawing boat, the skyline eventually and almost imperceptibly being suffused by a block of bluish hues. The reframing of the skyline is compounded by the patterns of gull swoops and dives and the froth of waves that quicken in the forefront of the screen. The voiceover is finally silent; the only sound is of water, the engine of the offscreen boat and the cry of gulls. The sequence lasts for about ten minutes, ending when the reel ends. It is this combination of the sharp plunge into darkness, followed by the camera pulling out onto the water and the subsequent framing of the image in a kind of abstract liquidity that I found particularly moving, in a literal as well as a psychological sense.

I would not want to account for this movement in any commonsensical manner. Richard Kwietniowski discusses this scene as ‘a return, a journey back to the mother’.¹¹ This for me would be an example of over-binding the diffuse scattering of chaotic sensations that the sequence instigates. Heath’s impossible question of desire then? No. What was happening here was altogether possible. While the density of the image contracts to an almost blank screen, its liquidity becomes the locus for unleashing a tracery of sensations that gather and fall between the patterns of the current, following the swooping motion of the gulls in the blueness. The continuous accumulating movement of this tracery of sensations goes against the melancholia of being fixed on an absence (of the mother, the daughter, the lost object of psychoanalytic parlance). Instead, the space between spectator and screen becomes dynamically redefined as a space without content that

¹¹ Richard Kwietniowski, ‘Separations: Chantal Akerman’s *News From Home* (1976) and *Toute une nuit* (1982)’, *Movie*, nos 34/35 (1990), p. 113.

extends in tandem with the flow of affective movements that traverse and enliven it. The irony is that this mobilizing passion is strangely dependent on a passive reception of the image, the viewer having abdicated the (active) desire to possess the image and become absorbed in its subtle mobilizations, immersed in its unfolding. However, the passive reception that *News from Home* engenders is not in opposition to activity. While, as Kaja Silverman states, 'to be in a receptive relation to external stimuli is assumed to imply a passive acceptance in the face of the "given"',¹² I shall argue, by way of Deleuze, that *News from Home* recasts spectatorial passivity in terms of a temporalized dynamic of affective movement.

Passive reception beyond the passive versus active binary

Passivity in classical feminist film theory relates to the negativity of the woman's look, a position of powerlessness, 'the passive, feminine identification with the image (body, landscape)' in turn producing 'the masochist position, the (impossible) place of a purely passive desire'.¹³ Teresa de Lauretis is referring specifically to classical narrative film, but her sentiments of an 'impossible' place echo Heath's discussion of *News from Home*. De Lauretis's model of female spectatorship as a double articulation in which the spectator is both passively identifying with the image and actively producing the narrative, while positive, is still couched in the value-laden binary of activity and passivity. Is it possible to think of passivity as having a dynamic other than being the negative of activity? Stephen Koch has also discussed the passive gaze, in relation to Andy Warhol, to whom Akerman has been compared.¹⁴ Koch discusses Warhol's early films – for example *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964) – as generating a kind of 'passive meditation' where 'the darting vivacity of the gaze becomes a stare'.¹⁵ He says that 'perception is introjected and internalized; visuality itself loses its vivacity and is touched by an autistic, unresonating stillness' which, he maintains, ultimately denies the senses.¹⁶ The fascinating thing about Akerman's camera in *News from Home* is that it simultaneously generates a fixed stare and a mobile diffusion across the surface of the image. By contrast to Koch's analysis of Warhol, I would claim that the passive meditation and absorption in the image generated by *News from Home* is simultaneously full of the 'darting, impulsive visual flashes by which the space of action is defined'.¹⁷ To maintain this claim necessitates rethinking the space of action so that action is not seen in opposition to inaction, activity in opposition to passivity. Deleuze, as we shall see, will be useful to this rethinking.

Akerman, discussing the *fixe* nature of her films with Gary Indiana, states:

¹² Kaja Silverman, 'The author as receiver', *October*, no. 96 (2001), p. 27.

¹³ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 144, 151.

¹⁴ Stephen Koch, *Stargazer: the Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol* (New York, NY and London: Marion Boyars, 1991). For a comparison between Warhol and Akerman, see Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 36–41.

¹⁵ Koch, *Stargazer*, p. 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Chantal Akerman, in Gary Indiana, 'Getting ready for the golden eighties: a conversation with Chantal Akerman by Gary Indiana', *Artforum*, vol. 21, no. 10 (1983), p.58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Dana Polan, 'Jack and Gilles: reflections on Deleuze's cinema of ideas', *Art & Text*, no. 34 (1989), p. 24.

²¹ For a use of Deleuze in relation to 'third cinema', see Laura U. Marks, 'A Deleuzian politics of hybrid cinema', *Screen*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994), pp. 244–64, and her book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000). For a use of Deleuze in relation to mainstream film, see Barbara M. Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: the Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

²² James Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-garde Cinema* (Detroit, MI: Wayne University Press, 1994); William C. Wees, *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Film* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

When you look at a picture, if you look just one second, you get the information, 'that's a corridor'. But after a while you forget it's a corridor, you just see that it's yellow, red; that it's lines; and then again it comes back as a corridor.¹⁸

She states that she wants 'people to lose themselves in the frame, and at the same time to be truly confronting the space', to be moving between information and abstraction.¹⁹ In *News from Home*, buildings, roads and passersby are equal protagonists on the film's surface, becoming depersonalized as individual entities and taking on abstract qualities of movement within the space, becoming the lines, shapes and colours that Akerman talks about above in relation to her film *Hotel Monterey* (1972). The camera's stare generates a fluidity of movement between recognition and abstraction, a to-ing and fro-ing which is active in one sense, but it is an action that is undergone in a state where the image has suspended the logic of cause and effect. In this suspension, the viewer receives the image in a somewhat passive state, as the irrational logic of the image dominates, the viewer being affected by the minute differences occurring within the image itself rather than linking images in terms of external causality. What would it mean to think of passive reception as a kind of liberation from the movement of oscillation between passivity and activity, a liberation that generates another kind of (inner) movement? Gilles Deleuze's philosophy can make an interesting contribution to this question.

At first glance Deleuze might seem to be an unlikely ally. On the one hand, although his *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* are often referred to as being not particularly useful in relation to the analysis of the 'complexity of postwar Hollywood cinema',²⁰ it is in relation to that multifarious body of cinema and to 'third cinema' that Deleuzian analyses are employed rather than in relation to avant-garde cinema.²¹ Deleuze's brief forays into avant-garde film in his cinema books, such as his discussion of Michael Snow in *Cinema 1*, tend to repeat P. Adams Sitney's visionary romanticism, which may in part account for the absence of Deleuze in recent avant-garde film analyses.²² Interestingly, Barbara M. Kennedy's use of Deleuze in *Deleuze and Cinema: the Aesthetics of Sensation* leads her to treat mainstream films such as *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1990), *Romeo + Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann, 1996) and *The Sheltering Sky* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1990) almost as if they were avant garde, her readings emphasizing affect and attending to colour, form, duration and movement. However, she still has the representational economy of narrative plotlines and characters to solder the more elusive, abstract elements of her Deleuzian approach to these films. Kennedy's approach also highlights the main reason why Deleuze seems an unlikely ally to muster in support of reframing a classic of feminist cinema such as *News from Home*. My approach differs from

Kennedy's in combining Deleuze's writing on cinema with his earlier *Difference and Repetition*. Whereas she pins her analysis of affect on Deleuze and Guattari's problematic term 'becoming-woman', I insist it is necessary to examine this term critically as it is largely responsible for Deleuze's fraught relationship to feminist theory. While I am sympathetic to Kennedy's use of Deleuze to bypass the question of the representation of woman in recent Hollywood films and concentrate instead on affect and sensation in the image, her framing of this in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-woman' casts a shadow on her goal to consider spectatorship in terms of a state of 'subjectless subjectivity'.²³

The notion of 'becoming' is central to Deleuze's philosophy.

Proffering 'becoming' rather than being, Deleuze suggests that identity is always 'in process', always open to what it is not yet, rather than residing in a stable entity such as the ego. This notion of a processual identity is of interest to feminist theory as it obliterates the rigid distinction between the subject and the object whereby the feminine is always figured in terms of the latter. However, in explicating the serial process of 'becoming', Deleuze states that all becomings – this includes both men and women – have to go through a 'becoming-woman', a 'becoming-animal', and so forth. There cannot be a 'becoming-man' as man is a dominant term – what Deleuze calls a molar identity – and the trajectory of becoming is to engage the molecular level of being where we find fluidity and change.²⁴ Although Kennedy is right in dissociating the term from real women, this choice of phrase in Deleuze and Guattari's work has been much criticized by feminist philosophers. Kennedy insists that

'becoming-woman' is not captured or restricted within a specific physical form. It is not chromosomally, psychoanalytically, biologically, culturally, libidinally or socially defined. This re-wiring of processes is therefore immanent to material flows. These are not conceptually driven. They are *affectively* driven. 'Becoming-woman' is then, a process of *affectivity*, not a concept which describes a move towards a political agency or subjectivity.²⁵

However, for Rosi Braidotti, while Deleuze's emphasis on multiple identities and dissolute subjectivities make him attractive for a feminist praxis, the conjoining of 'becoming' with the nouns 'woman', 'animal' and 'child' can only be celebrated by a male theorist located as a subject in relation to a phallic order.²⁶ In other words, one has to be a subject before one can afford to lose one's identity in becoming and multiplicity. While Braidotti welcomes Deleuze's emphasis on desire unattached to specific coded objects – and it is this emphasis I find useful here – for Braidotti there is a danger in his thinking that tends to obviate the very real and continuing struggle for recognition that is associated with a feminist subjectivity.

²³ Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*, p. 2.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), p. 276.

²⁵ Barbara M. Kennedy, 'Constituting bodies: constituting life: from subjectivity to affect and the "becoming-woman" of the cinematic', URL: <http://home.pacific.net.au/~robert/azimute/film/constituting-bodies.html> [accessed 23 September 2003].

²⁶ Lisa Jardine's critique of Deleuze follows a similar logic. See Dorothea Olkowski's useful summary of Jardine's and other feminist critiques of Deleuze in chapter two of her *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 32–58. Elizabeth Grosz takes a pragmatic view of how Deleuze's emphasis on multiplicity is of benefit to feminism in 'A thousand tiny sexes: feminism and rhizomatics', in Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (eds), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 187–212.

²⁷ Rosi Braidotti, 'Discontinuing becomings: Deleuze on the becoming-woman of philosophy', *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1993), pp. 44–55, 51–2.

²⁸ See D. N. Rodowick's account of this in 1970s feminist-influenced film theory, epitomized by Claire Johnston's work in *his Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 246–9.

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), p. 196.

³⁰ Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York, NY and London: Verso, 1994), p. 164.

Fragmentation being woman's historical condition, we are left with the option of either disagreeing with Deleuze's theory of becoming, or of flatly stating that women have been Deleuzian since the beginnings of time.²⁷

The naturalizing of fragmentation as woman's condition repeats the criticisms made by feminist-influenced film theory of the notion of a cinematic feminine writing, which tended, in its employment of Kristeva especially, to essentialize fragmentation as a particularly female mode of address that subverts Oedipal economies of narrative.²⁸ Deleuze's reference to Akerman in *Cinema 2* shows that for all his emphasis on the flow of becoming he too falls foul of this tendency to essentialize the feminine. He briefly contextualizes her cinema in terms of a female 'gest' that acts as a subversion of patriarchal narrative order, his analysis being typical of that very order in attributing a subversive otherness to femininity.

But the chain of states of the female body is *not* closed: descending from the mother or going back to the mother, it serves as a revelation to . . . the environment, which now makes itself seen or heard only through the window of a room, or a train, a whole art of sound. . . . The states of the body secrete the slow ceremony which joins together the corresponding attitudes, and develop a female gest which overcomes the history of men and the crisis of the world.²⁹

In using Deleuze to articulate an alternative way of looking at *News from Home*, I want to avoid what I see as his capitulation to the cliche of subversive femininity. I maintain that while it is useful to think of the flow of becoming, there is no necessity to attach this process to the gendered term 'woman'. In fact, Claire Colebrook refers to 'a becoming-life',³⁰ which resonates with Deleuze's notion that the affects and sensations produced by the image go beyond individual experience. Partly deriving his use of the term 'affect' from Spinoza, for whom the affect is a state of passion that produces and creates bodies rather than being owned by a particular body, for Deleuze,

perceptions are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. . . . Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. . . . The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself.³¹

While the absolute divorce from a perceiving body in Deleuze and Guattari's conception of affect is problematic, and I shall return to this later, the emphasis on an impersonal body of surface intensities is useful as a counterfoil to the psychoanalytic depth model of the subject. In the latter, the subject is always searching for the meaning of its discourse, whereas for Deleuze and Guattari the subject is always in a state of process, being fractured by pre-personal differences that exceed

identity. These pre-personal or unbound differences become consolidated into individual identities, but are never eradicated by them. It is something of the movement of this scene of difference that *News from Home* opens onto: affective movements which are beyond or before the passivity/activity binary that characterizes the subject/object dialectic. These affective movements are both active in the sense of pulverizing identity and passive in the sense that the body is possessed by them, yet they are beyond the objective registration of that body's consciousness. Between the folds of liquid lapping and the subtle reframing of the horizon in the final sequence of *News from Home*, 'I' disappear, forgetting myself, but strangely coming back to myself in a new form. 'I' lose the infamous image of the New York skyline in a series of blue and grey striations, which disperse themselves in a fugue-like manner, absorbing 'me' into their nuanced repetitions and differences, the almost imperceptible gradations between one striation and another. In claiming that *News from Home* is generative of subjectivity as an affective movement of sensations prior to or beyond identity, feminine or otherwise, I am using the film as a theoretical object that allows me creatively to rework aspects of Deleuze's philosophy to review the negativity of Heath's unresolved question and the equation of passivity and absence with femininity.

In terms of my argument, it is worth remembering that in a Deleuzian economy absence does not reign over the subject as an absolute primordial lack as it does in psychoanalytic theory. In Deleuze's emphasis on the flow of becoming (and I am deliberately not conjoining 'becoming' with 'woman' here), absence is reconfigured as an interval between two sensations, which is continually productive of new affective transformations. It is the in-between, what Deleuze refers to as the passage between one sensation and another.³² Deleuze's formulation of an absence that is both immaterial and productive of the materiality of affect resonates with *News from Home*'s reframing, one might say deepening, of absence in the film's final sequence. The ten-minute sequence of the disappearing horizon line images a fluid architecture, which passes in time and extends in space, carrying the viewer away on waves of duration, engendering a sensibility that can be formulated in terms of Deleuze's syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition*.

The irrational interval

The two categories of cinematic images, movement-images and time-images, which Deleuze rather generally aligns to prewar and postwar cinema, are infamous. Before going on to look at Deleuze's more complex syntheses of time, it may be useful to rehearse some of the characteristics of these two categories of cinematic images. In the cinema of the movement-image, actions are linked in time by means of the logical relations of cause and effect. The sensory motor schema in

³² Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York, NY: Zone, 2001), p. 25.

which perception is extended into action dominates the sequencing of images. In the cinema of the direct time-image, the coordinates of the sensory motor schema of the movement-image are abandoned. Instead of characters being able to extend their perceptions into action, their internal mental states pervade the image, often immobilizing it or causing images to succeed one another by means of false continuity shots, thereby creating what Deleuze calls aberrant movement. D.N. Rodowick defines aberrant movement in terms of 'breaks or ruptures in space, irrational intervals that open a direct image of time' in the cinematic image.³³ *News from Home* may not be an example of a direct time-image cinema *per se*; however, the suspension of recognition and its oscillation with abstraction in the final sequence is akin to aspects of time-image cinema. In a cinema of the time-image an intensive, infinitely expanding duration or interval suspends action, whereas in the movement-image the interval is ultimately closed by action. In the direct time-image the interval no longer assures continuity in space and succession in time. 'The interval is no longer filled by a sensorimotor situation; it neither marks the trajectory between an action and a reaction nor bridges two sets through continuity links. Instead, the interval ... becomes "irrational": not a link bridging images, but an interstice between [them].'³⁴ For Rodowick, the interval becomes 'an unbridgeable gap whose recurrences give movement as displacements in space marked by false continuity'.³⁵ However, I diverge slightly from this reading of the interval. I would claim instead that within the gap opened up by the interval in *News from Home*, another series of (imperceptible) linkages take place.³⁶

³³ D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 54.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ For a reading of this gap that also diverges from Rodowick's and correlates with mine, see Laleen Jayamanne, *Toward Cinema and Its Double: Cross-Cultural Mimesis*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001). Jayamanne insists that 'such an image event infused with the senses has the capacity, according to Deleuze, to enable thinking across a gap. To think across a gap is to make linkages across cuts that are "non-rational". This is the creativity of this new form of image. It helps to form links across incommensurable gaps between any sensory image whatever and a virtual image' (p. 139).

The passive syntheses of time

In *Difference and Repetition*, written earlier than the cinema books, Deleuze traces a 'model', or perhaps it would be more correct to call it a 'pattern', of subjectivity where passivity extends beyond the binary of active/passive. This 'pattern' of subjectivity can be connected to the transformative effect of the final sequence of *News from Home*. By contrast to psychoanalytic accounts of the subject, which posit an active libidinous origin, the Deleuzian subject is formed from a conjunction of passive contemplation and contraction. Contemplation, which characterizes what Deleuze calls the first passive synthesis, is an impersonal state of reflection on the heterogeneous flow of ontological difference. The emergent self here is possessed by the world and dispersed in a field of unbound differences that are both fracturing and synthetic. In a descriptive sense, it is this kind of movement that I see generated by the final sequence of *News from Home*. The hypnotic focus on a single view that is minutely shifting, making almost imperceptible distinctions in scale, distance and hue, opens a space where a diffuse subjectivity can fall between movements yet can simultaneously link these shifting distinctions as a heterogeneous

duration. However, the link with Deleuze's 'pattern' of subjectivity does not and cannot end at this descriptive level.

In the first passive synthesis of time the self is in a kind of larval state. The things that it contemplates in the world of unbound differences cohere the self into a minimal body but do not give it an identity, as this temporal zone of contemplation is impersonal, a purely affective state. For Deleuze, the constitution of the self is not, as in psychoanalytic accounts, premised on the stabilization of identity in relation to an object of fantasy. Rather, immersed in a chaotic, energetic field of differences, the self as an identity is formed by means of a series of contractions by which it selects those parts of the world that are of particular interest. In contrast to the psychoanalytic constitution of the ego, for Deleuze this is not a once and for all occurrence. 'At the level of each binding, an ego is formed in the Id; a passive, partial, larval, contemplative and contracting ego. The Id is populated by local egos'; not, as in Freud, one entity. As Deleuze explains: 'It (the eye or seeing ego) produces itself or "draws itself" from what it contemplates (and from what it contracts and invests by contemplation)'.³⁷ This is the second synthesis of time. It is of interest to my analysis of *News from Home* because it situates the oscillation between fracture and synthesis in terms of objects of desire rather than a regressive larval state.

Out of the contractions, which occur in the second synthesis of time, a relation to two series of objects is formed: on the one hand, totalizable objects (objects of fantasy and desire), and on the other, partial or virtual objects. The former are bound up with need and identification. They occupy the realm of representation and nominal articulation. The latter are tied to a deepening of the initial passive synthesis of time. They are bound up with contemplative qualities rather than quantities. For Deleuze, the deepening of the first passive synthesis allows for the capacity of originary unbound differences to change the direction of our attachments to, and habits associated with, totalizable objects. The partial or virtual objects are absent in terms representation, but they are not as absolutely absent as they might be in a psychoanalytic model. They are continuously folding over and exchanging places with totalizable objects, forming a looped, intersecting pattern like a Moebius strip and thereby producing new directions of desire.

A useful example to differentiate what is at stake in a Deleuzian economy from psychoanalysis, and which returns me to *News from Home*, is Freud's *fort-da* game. For Freud the boy overcomes the passivity of a situation which has overwhelmed him – the disappearance of the mother – by throwing a cotton-reel in and out of his cot and thereby transforming the action into a game in which he takes an active role. In Deleuze's slant on this scenario, mastery and the overcoming of passivity is downplayed in favour of elevating the initial passivity into an intensified passion with no goal other than its own repetition. From a Deleuzian perspective, the Freudian mapping of

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 97.

passivity onto the disappearance of the mother is not originary, but is itself a way of binding the heterogeneous flow of differences to which the ego is subject by default. Therefore the creation of new objects and images is not in order to fill in an originary lack, but an effort to restage a scenario in which we are subjected to the qualities of liberating differences for no other purpose than pure pleasure. As Dorothea Olkowski puts it:

in order for something new to be created, repetition will not be merely repetition of something habitual that conforms to the expectation of mother, father, or society; for while passive synthesis is the basis of habit and action, it also deepens in contemplation so as to make real the virtual object.³⁸

While Akerman has enigmatically stated that 'it's always your mother and father you run into on a journey', for me the final sequence of *News from Home* presents a scene that allows the spectator to wander in the liberated space of free unbound differences.³⁹

Deleuze's discussion of the interplay between totalizable and partial objects in *Difference and Repetition* is reminiscent of his discussion of the circuit of actual and virtual images in the cinema of the time-image, where the image of time splits into two parts: the actual which corresponds to the present that passes, and the virtual which belongs to the past that is preserved. Because of the continuous exchange or linkage between these circuits, the actual (present) is always accompanied by a set of (virtual) inflections that can generate new constellations of affect that are not reducible to what we recognize or remember of the past, but redirect our patterns of desire. So, unlike psychoanalytic accounts of the subject, we are not always returning to an archaic object of desire in the past – the mother – but have the capacity to encounter something which is not tied to an object but to a quality of being. This encounter, which I maintain is staged by the final sequence of *News from Home*, suspends the world of habit and submerges the human perspective of subject and object into what Deleuze calls 'the empty form of Time'. *News from Home* opens out onto this temporal dimension and allows us to feel what is only an abstract concept in the world of habit. Rather than 'the impossible question of a woman's desire', which patriarchy designates as lining the limit of representation, we are given access to the actuality of temporal movements, which incorporate stillness and change.

Absence as linkage

In the final image sequence of *News from Home*, the 'I' is released into a scattering that does not have a definite goal in mind, but contracts and extends in relation to an image whose spatial coordinates are continually being reframed. The 'I' forms other series of contemplations of itself – of water, sky and air, the space of breathing

that the openness of the image releases. Contemplations that in turn produce sensations of movement that are localized by the body/spectator but are not reducible to that body as an object in space. In this final sequence, 'I' am touched by a force or forces that affect me from within, although they seem to come from outside. Floating along the motion of the water, dipping and curving along the flight lines of the seagulls, a vacant 'I' follows the undulations of movement that form one over the other, disappearing like tones of wave swell on a river. Deleuze could almost be talking about *News from Home* when he says:

And on land, movement always takes place from one point to another, always between two points, while on water the point is always between two movements: it thus marks the conversion or inversion of movement, as in the hydraulic relationship of a dive and a counter-dive, which is found in the movement of the camera itself (the final fall of the entwined bodies of the two lovers has no end, but is converted into an ascending movement).⁴⁰

There are no human bodies visible, no lovers or any others, simply a movement away from the shore, a moving away which is also a moving towards, two directions that overlap in a loop, cracking the air like a whip, fabricating a space where 'I' am fractured yet connected, spread out yet contracted. In this minuscule gap, the 'I' is different from, displaced from, itself as a bounded entity, the different forms of its displacing (self-affecting) movements relating to one another in a continuum. Geometric space becomes unsedimented, the 'I' being carried away by those continuous inner movements that lie inbetween its character as a marker of identity.

The motor force of this film moment – an engine slicing through water – propels the spectator into a field of repetitious formations that are continually per/forming infinitesimal differences between the surface of its body and the surface of the image. Differences between one gradation of light and another, one ripple of water and another, play against the spreading of the horizon across the screen into an almost monotone blankness. Between these differences, the 'I' simultaneously coils in upon itself (contracts) and opens out onto a vacancy with which it conjoins to perform other (possible) forms or versions of itself. The question of what these other forms might be is kept open.

Recasting absence in *News from Home* in the light of a Deleuzian reading means taking the film away from a representational economy which seeks to posit a content for the film and by extension for the feminine subject. While I agree with Braidotti's reservations about Deleuze, perhaps it is time in feminist aesthetics to attend to the possibilities that ensue from a liberation of identity. In relation to the final sequence of *News from Home*, these possibilities would be in terms of the productivity of affective engagement and enjoyment of the fugue-like pattern of discontinuity generated by a fluctuating absence.

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), p. 79.

41 Outside of a film context, Elizabeth Grosz makes the similar claim that her current interest in Deleuzian notions of becoming and time is a way to reinvent an approach to her earlier work on feminisms and the body. See Grosz, *Architecture From the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001).

42 See Rosi Braidotti, 'Toward a new nomadism: feminist Deleuzian tracks; or, metaphysics and metabolism', in Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (eds), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 157–86.

Rather than always insisting, as would be correct in an economy of representation, that one has to be a subject before one can enjoy losing one's identity, perhaps it is time to attend to spaces of becoming and change that immersion in the film moment of absence can offer.⁴¹ *News from Home*'s reframing of absence offers a modality of liberation, the modality of self-affection, whereby the spectator is absorbed into the rhythm and flow of intervallic movements internal to the image and the body moving in time.

Inner movements

News from Home's processual reconfiguration of absence is, in the final sequence, generative of something new rather than a return to something archaic. The senses are liberated from being fixed on singular objects and opened up to a diffuse derangement that can be articulated along the lines of the Deleuzian model of subjectivity discussed above. But while Deleuze is useful in considering absence as generative of affective movement in relation to *News from Home*, I do agree in part with Braidotti's critique that he divorces those liberated sensations from the body in such a way that it becomes difficult to relocate sensation in human terms.⁴² While the release into a diffuse sensory scattering in the final sequence of *News from Home* has to do with the liberation of personal 'feelings' into the impersonality of affective movement, the spectator's body still acts as a locus for the passage of these sensations. To encapsulate the bodily depth of these impersonal affective movements, I want to end with the ideas of a novelist associated with the *nouveau roman*, Nathalie Sarraute. There is some resonance between Sarraute and Deleuze, which may have to do with his interest in the *nouveau roman* (he often refers to Alain Robbe-Grillet in *Cinema 2*). However, unlike Deleuze's Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute emphasizes the human as the passage or expression of these impersonal sensations in a way that echoes the affective mobile scattering of the final sequence of *News from Home* without returning us to the positionality of a centred humanist subject.

In her novel *Tropisms*, Sarraute describes objects and people that intersect one another's spaces without having fixed identities or situations. What she tries to show in her writing are certain 'inner movements' which

slip through us on the frontiers of consciousness in the form of indefinable extremely rapid sensations. They hide behind our gestures, beneath the words we speak and the feelings we manifest, all of which we are aware of experiencing, and are able to define. They seemed, and still seem to me, to constitute the secret source of our existence, in what might be called its nascent state. While we are performing them, no words express them, not even those of the interior monologue – for they develop and pass through us very

rapidly in the form of frequently very sharp, brief sensations, without our perceiving clearly what they are – it was not possible to communicate them to the reader otherwise than by means of equivalent images that would make him experience analogous sensations. It was also necessary to make them break up and spread out in the consciousness of the reader the way a slow-motion film does. Time was no longer the time of real life, but of a hugely amplified present.⁴³

43 Nathalie Sarraute, *Tropisms and the Age of Suspicion*, trans. Maria Jolas (London: John Calder, 1963), p. 8.

This notion of a hugely amplified present, full of minute flickering sensations so transient that they run through us, resonates for me with the final sequence of *News from Home*. The erratic pacing of the film as a whole leads into this final spreading out of undulating liquid motion, contained, yet flowing. There is still absence in the sense of being able to define an object; but the difference in my reading is that absence is not felt as a loss but as an intensity filled by spatio-temporal dynamisms that move and flow in its train. This movement unhinges us from the past and opens us up to future becomings of the 'I'.

The ending is infinite. In that final sequence, 'my' claustrophobic surrender to the repetitious accumulations of both soundtrack and imagetrack is suspended and the encroaching openness that the film has been probing is revealed. If 'I' identify with anything, it is with the flight of the seagulls as their sway carries me away on the surface skin of a duration which reconfigures 'me'. Opened up to liquid motion, 'I' became a tracery of something gathering and falling between the current, between the swoop of gulls in the blueness. 'I' move with the motor and animal calls that populate this new space, the curve of a wing, the ruffle of a wave. The abstract movements of curving and ruffling, movements that have disappeared by the time 'I' recognize them, flow through 'me'. Not the 'impossible question of a woman's desire', but the fluid dynamism of affective movements that disclose how 'I' subsist in time, fractured, and flowing like a river at the edge of a city. From these impersonal sensations that move through me, a new subjective relation is generated away from a fixation on the past and open to the echoes of the future.

Breaking the Waves and the negativity of Melanie Klein: rethinking 'the female spectator'

SUZY GORDON

Breaking the Waves (Lars von Trier, 1996) appears to defy any appropriation by feminism. At the film's close, a woman's self-sacrifice in the name of love – her capitulation to sexual abuse and then death – is affirmed as an act of righteousness. And yet the film's treatise on 'goodness' gives way to a destructiveness that not only requires the woman's demise but also articulates her power. This essay is an attempt to address the double burden of destructiveness thus placed on the woman, a difficulty which is also at the heart of Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theories. In the first instance, I read the requirement on the woman as a challenge to positive accounts of female subjectivity: without the immanent threat of devastation the subject can have no meaning, no claim to power or autonomy. Secondly, I trace this same narrative in Klein's work on reparation where every advance made towards psychic integration, and towards an ethics based on love and compassion, is menaced by the destructiveness it is meant to diminish. In mapping these correspondences between film and psychoanalysis, I develop a theory of negativity, defined as the intractable psychic violence that threatens the very subjectivity it also generates and sustains.

Via a series of theoretical moves, I respond to the mutual negativity of Klein and *Breaking the Waves* by revisiting cine-psychanalytic feminist debates about spectatorship. What might happen, I ask, if we think of spectatorship as a privileged site for articulating negativity, as a struggle to cast aside the destructiveness without which the subject

cannot 'be'? The problem of 'the female spectator' stakes this out: 'she' acknowledges the inseparability of a feminist concern with women's pleasures from the felt compromises of complicity or dispossession. I explain moreover that the unsettling premiss of *Breaking the Waves* and Klein's text reinflects that earlier set of problems, forcing us to consider the central importance of negativity for feminist film theory itself, and complicating any easy distinction between objects that are either 'good' or 'bad' for feminism. Indeed, in mapping out a developmental schema in which the child is sustained by the very thing that threatens it, Klein's work discloses a negative dynamic also at the crux of feminism's encounters with the filmic objects it would want to denounce. This essay challenges us finally to countenance negativity as a constitutive condition of feminist film theory, as a mode of feminist possibility that puts at risk the very subjectivity it makes tenable. On this basis it uses Klein's theories as a way of recasting the question of what is at stake for the woman – as spectator and image – in contemporary cinema.

Subjectivity and dispossession

A brief sequence in *Breaking the Waves* demonstrates once more the much debated problem of 'the female spectator'. Bess McNeill sits at the cinema, captivated by the onscreen image at a showing of *Lassie Come Home*, absorbed in her own enjoyment. The camera looks head-on at Bess and her husband Jan from the position of the screen, panning from Jan to linger on Bess. Jan smiles lovingly at Bess, his gaze framing her spectatorial stance. But Bess is unable to look away from the screen, her mouth agape and eyes wide. Very quickly, a diegetic profile of a woman as spectator in the cinema transmutes into a question of her status *as* image. Marking out such a precarious subjectivity, the film also fuses this woman's childlike fascination with an image of her absorption to the point of distraction. The pleasures of the cinema for this female spectator thus force open a connection between subjectivity and dispossession.



Bess (Emily Watson) is unable to look away from the screen. *Breaking the Waves* (Lars von Trier, 1996).

This difficulty clearly engages us in feminism's ongoing interrogation of how best to address the cinema's gendered fascinations. And its pessimism takes us right back to the problem of 'the female spectator' first delineated by cine-psychoanalytic feminists. Mary Ann Doane, for instance, has explained that such images of female spectators 'in spectatorial ecstasy' signify 'the peculiar susceptibility to the image – to the cinematic spectacle in general – attributed to the woman in our culture'.¹ Yet at the same time, the historically persistent 'image of the longing, overinvolved female spectator', given to 'proximity ... passivity ... and overidentification', in fact feminizes a cinematic spectatorship that for feminist film theory has been denied to women.² Repeating this double requirement – that the woman be both lost in the image and fashioned *as* image – this short sequence in *Breaking the Waves* holds within its frame a whole history of feminist encounters with the negative place assigned to the woman in the cinema. It rephrases for a new generation – and acutely – the female spectator who troubles any easy articulation of subjectivity and desire, who is bound to the pleasures of a system that ensures her dissolution. The ending of the film takes to an extreme this link between subjectivity and dispossession: only in her death, in a moment of utter dispossession, is Bess's belief in the power and influence of her actions endorsed. In what follows I trace more precisely the contours of such a pessimistic view of female subjectivity, and address the challenges it poses to established ways of engaging the problem of 'the female spectator'.

Bess's cinematic looking also throws into relief Christian Metz's description of the truly 'credulous' spectator, someone (in us all) who is lost to the cinema's claim on their belief.³ Without this ingenuous 'someone', that more conscious – and more congenial – idea of a suspension of disbelief holds no sway. Without her, neither pleasurable absorption nor critical theorization prove possible (you cannot enjoy a film nor can you forge any kind of distance from it unless for a moment at least you have been entirely duped by the fiction film as reality).

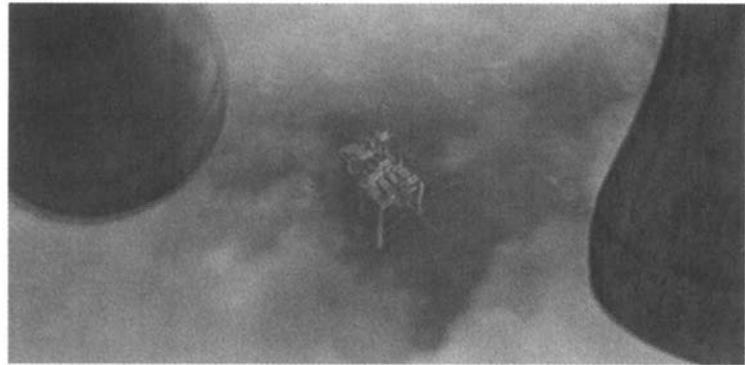
Breaking the Waves invokes and affirms such a figure – for Metz someone truly 'abused by the diegesis' – in its most compelling form.⁴ Jan has suffered an accident at the oil rig (where he works) which leaves him brain damaged and paralyzed. He urges Bess to take a lover and to recount her sexual experiences to him so that they can 'be together' again. Believing that it will restore Jan's rapidly deteriorating health, Bess submits herself to a series of increasingly violent and degrading sexual encounters resulting, finally, in her death. She dies for him and for her belief. And, after her death, Jan is cured. A final point-of-view shot from behind two large pealing bells suspended magically in the sky announces the dead woman as healer, affirming Bess's belief and forcing an acknowledgement of its veracity. It replaces the church bells as she had wished – the verger had said, 'we do not need bells in our church to worship God' but Bess said 'I like church bells, let's put

1 Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 1.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

3 Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), p. 72.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 72.



The pealing bells announce the dead woman as healer. *Breaking the Waves* (Lars von Trier, 1996).

5 Stephen Heath, 'God, faith and film: *Breaking the Waves*', *Literature and Theology*, vol. 12, no.1 (1998), p. 101.

6 Lizzie Francke, 'Breaking the Waves', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 6, no. 10 (1996), p. 37.

7 Lars von Trier, quoted in Slavoj Žižek, 'Death and the maiden', in Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (eds), *The Žižek Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 216.

8 Lars von Trier, cited in (no author), 'A story about people and emotions', in *Breaking the Waves – Lars von Trier* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 17.

9 Lars von Trier, 'Director's note – this film is about "good"', in *Breaking the Waves – Lars von Trier*, p. 20.

them back again'. In this moment the film *takes over* Bess's belief in the reparative power of her self-sacrifice: there is no other explanation of Jan's recovery. The magic of the apparatus 'commits' spectators to a recognition of the power of her loving sacrifice, and guarantees, as Stephen Heath puts it, 'our being in the film as finally seeing *from there*'.⁵

Heath's phrasing should remind us that the magic of this filmic reparation takes place from afar, from a 'heavenly point of view': here the camera takes up a physical distance from its otherwise dizzying proximity to the characters.⁶ Laying claim to unmitigated faith, its certainty and truth, and inviting spectators to participate in that claim, to see 'from there', this ending also draws attention to the film's status as film. Physical distance ruptures the ubiquitous closeup aesthetic, the 'raw, documentary style': it registers the presence and intervention of technique that is otherwise disavowed.⁷ Thus two apparently oppositional modes – critical distance and unmitigated faith – are required at the same time. The very act of distancing, of drawing apart or refusing absorption, compels that ingenuous believer of whom Metz speaks. So vividly captured in the profile of a female spectator, the link between subjectivity and dispossession is finally forced upon you, made a condition of your watching, even as you draw back and take up a distance.

Notably, the film's diegetic framing of a female spectator – caught between subjection *to* the image and subjection *as* image – also appeals to its larger discourse on 'goodness' and 'love'. The brief moment in the cinema vividly presents Jan's love for 'someone he sees as an angel', a love of the 'good' which Lars von Trier explains as the motivating force of his film.⁸ 'For a long time', von Trier writes, 'I have been wanting to conceive a film in which all driving forces are "good". In the film there should only be "good".'⁹ An appeal to the purity and primacy of goodness is laid bare in that image of a female spectator, of a woman who is degraded and yet sanctified by her belief. Unquestionably, von Trier's demand that 'there should only be "good"' endorses a woman's self-destructiveness in the name of repair, vindicates male violence in the interests of 'love'. The grounds of

feminist opposition to *Breaking the Waves* quickly become clear: psychically and socially normative genderings are made palatable in an elaborate justification of sexual violence against women.

For Noreen Collins, the problem with *Breaking the Waves* is that it fails to present the woman's self-sacrifice, as recent feminist commentators on romance fiction might have hoped, as a 'visible re-working of classic romance'.¹⁰ It is not a critique but an extreme version of the naturalized female self-sacrifice that typifies romance narratives; part of a general 'obsession that male film-makers have with the subjects of prostitution and sexual violence', nothing more.¹¹

When I first heard the storyline of *Breaking the Waves*, my immediate thoughts were that, unless the film had a feminist slant it was in danger of glorifying female masochism and passivity, and of becoming in itself an exercise in female oppression. Having seen the film my worst suspicions were confirmed.¹²

This is an account of a film that is fundamentally oppressive because it lacks the necessary critical distance that would afford it some degree of political responsibility. That distance becomes pivotal in articulating what exactly constitutes either a 'good' or a 'bad' filmic object for feminism. Either the film is 'good' in offering a critical 'slant' on the generic conventions of women's self-sacrifice, thereby resisting patriarchal modes and negotiating the heterosexual contract; or else it is 'bad' because it condemns the woman to a complicity with the terms of her disempowerment.

On Collins's reading, what makes *Breaking the Waves* particularly pernicious is its sublimation of specifically political questions (here violence against women) into concerns of universal magnitude ('goodness' and miracles): 'the extreme and shocking degradation and death of a woman used as a metaphor for goodness is seen to be above feminist interpretations'.¹³ We should remember that this argument – narrative film provides a privileged instance of the dominant ideology passing off its representations as 'natural' and glossing sociohistorical constructions as universal truths – has in fact produced the means for a sustained *critique* of dominant cinema. Not condemnation, but the productive analysis of contradictions within patriarchal apparatuses and the speculation on potentially radical modes of representation could be said to typify feminist responses to the problem. It is surprising, therefore, to find that one of the few explicitly 'feminist' essays on *Breaking the Waves* should dismiss it on the grounds of its blatant misogyny.¹⁴ Would it not be more in keeping with developments in feminist theory to work with the film's internal contradictions? Perhaps better to demonstrate how its valorization of the woman's sexual suffering pressurizes the very categories – goodness, miracles – it is used to uphold? Crucially then, is there something about this film's presentation of the woman's suffering that undermines the task of salvaging it for feminism? Or else, how does this film complicate the

¹⁰ Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (eds), *Romance Revisited* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p. 24.

¹¹ Noreen Collins, 'Counterpoint', *Film West*, no. 27 (February 1997), p. 47.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* Alyda Faber also links the film's valorization of Bess's 'excessive goodness' to a broader effacement of 'the violation of women ... as violation in male dominant societies'. Faber, 'Redeeming sexual violence? A feminist reading of *Breaking the Waves*', *Literature and Theology*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2003), p. 73.

¹⁴ Not dissimilarly, Faber finds *Breaking the Waves* 'both conventional and unacceptable' on the grounds that it 'legitimizes male dominance' in its celebratory affirmation of Bess's masochism. Faber, 'Redeeming sexual violence?', p. 65.

presumption that some films are just too negative to be considered useful, or indeed ‘good’, for feminism?

What apparently makes *Breaking the Waves* most inimical to feminism is its association of a woman’s ‘will’ with her subordination. This is Collins: ‘Bess makes a series of sexual sacrifices at the command of her by now chronically ill husband. She enters into these encounters willingly … the abuse that Jan puts her through [is] … denied meaning.’¹⁵ One premiss here is that feminism is simply a politics of self-identity, tying a voluntaristic ‘will’ quite unproblematically to an assumption of autonomy and resistance. On these grounds, the film’s refusal to associate autonomy or power with self-presence makes it indisputably a ‘bad’ object for feminism. Notwithstanding such claims, *Breaking the Waves* in fact makes the woman’s identity and protest inconceivable outside the compass of her complicity with the genre’s gendered norms: a claim for her power is made only in death, and this a death and a power that extol her self-destructiveness. Viewed this way, the challenge of *Breaking the Waves* might be that what is perceived as ‘bad’ (convention, conformity, self-sacrifice) cannot be prised apart from what is ‘good’ (power, autonomy, agency). Although Collins wishes to preserve intact a version of feminism as the denunciation of what is – quite clearly – ‘bad’, *Breaking the Waves* disputes the idea that we can distinguish easily between ‘bad’ patriarchal forms and ‘good’ feminist modes. It complicates the possibility of positing a ‘good object’ for feminism, insisting instead that the ‘good’ is necessarily contaminated by the destructiveness – the ‘badness’ – it hopes to diminish.

Crucially, in this respect, there is a violence within Bess that goes unmentioned in most critical responses despite the fact that it is insistently signaled in the film.¹⁶ Hers is a love which can barely conceal the violence and aggression that sustains it. From the outset, Bess expresses her love for Jan by physically attacking him. As she waits for Jan to arrive by helicopter on their wedding day, Bess stamps her feet and grinds her teeth, repeating angrily to Dodo, her sister-in-law, ‘he’s late!’. When he finally arrives, Bess beats him across the chest and arms. When Jan leaves again for the rig, she strikes some scaffolding on the beach with a pole, then again beats his chest. This violence carries over into her prayer to God for Jan’s return – ‘Nothing else matters, I just want Jan home again. I pray to you, won’t you send him home?’ There is a reckless longing to this wish which the film marks with a certain violence: Jan is returned to Bess, but paralyzed and with brain-damage. If the film approves Bess’s belief in the omnipotence of her reparative powers (‘I’m the one who saved his life, I can save it again … love can save Jan’), it also, then, profiles the fulfilment of a destructive, sadistic wish (‘what happened on the rig was my fault – I prayed to God to send him home’). Against von Trier’s insistence that ‘all driving forces are “good”’, we should note therefore that the film depends as much on Bess’s belief in her

¹⁵ Collins, ‘Counterpoint’, p. 47.

¹⁶ Where it is mentioned, it is a sign of ‘hysteria’ or ‘unconditional devotion’, and so contributes to the film’s antifeminist agenda, ‘fortifying male social dominance as an exclusive rational power’. Faber, ‘Redeeming sexual violence?’, p. 69.

destructive powers as on her powers of reparation. Von Trier's claim effectively occludes the difficulty the film lays bare— that love and goodness originate in violence and destructiveness. Restoring the 'good' to a love gripped by violence and aggression, the ending at once reinstates Bess as source and origin of all that is good, and makes her pay twice over for that transformation (in dying she is excluded from knowing of Jan's recovery). A double requirement is thus placed on this woman: she must stand for pure, unpolluted goodness and love, and as the origin of the destructiveness the film is at pains to remedy.

What then if the film's struggle to represent, to enact, the 'goodness' which, for von Trier, is its motivating principle, discloses the destructiveness accorded to the woman and for which she is made to pay the price? What happens, in other words, if we consider that love, goodness and repair are necessarily menaced by violence and aggression? The film itself steps in to gloss this difficulty of the woman: it ensures that redemption or reparation prove possible only once her dispossession is guaranteed. A belief in goodness is thus made consonant with an image of a woman through whom violence and aggression become known, and in whom acts of self damage are approved. Momentarily, perhaps, this returns us to that image of an over-involved female spectator, beautifully framed as a loved object, her absorption so carefully rendered as cipher of 'the good'. This female spectator, brutalized and yet sanctified by her belief, crystallizes the image of goodness the film struggles to produce. Insisting on this same woman's complicity with her subordination, forging a connection between her 'will' and her own destruction, *Breaking the Waves* rephrases the problem generated by 'the female spectator' for feminist film theory. As I shall show, this horrendous spectre of female subjectivity haunts the problem of goodness that moves between *Breaking the Waves* and the work of Klein. First taking my lead from the film, however, I shall begin to address its significance for feminist film theory by returning to the question of proximity and over-identification.

Rethinking distance

Feminist film theory has from the outset been concerned with the question of distance from, and closeness to, the image. It is not without a certain distance, for example, that the voyeur stalks his object, not without displacing his fear of castration onto the (m)other's body that the fetish will afford him pleasure rather than danger. Classically the male spectator has been thought to enjoy a distance from the image that grants such pleasures. Locked into the image *as* image, object and not subject of the gaze, the female spectator on the other hand is thwarted by a stifling proximity that troubles the sovereignty of her desire and identifications. Such miserable conditions assigned to the female spectator have been disputed in the attempt to produce more positive

accounts of feminine subjectivity and cinematic spectatorship for women. In particular, the problem of over-identification has been countered by an insistence on the radical potential of distance as politically and psychically enabling. Indeed, within the broader shift from the study of the textual organization of vision to an increased focus on the historiography and ethnography of audiences, distance becomes a central category for theorizing a female spectatorship not condemned to passivity, but granted agency, autonomy and oppositional power.

Breaking the Waves, as I have said, makes that link between debilitating proximity and a female spectator. Held within the male gaze of a lover whose later sexual demands motivate her to engineer her own violation, this moment not only profiles the classical alignment of the male gaze with sadistic voyeurism and the female spectator with a self-effacing masochism, but adds the proviso that the woman assume responsibility for the man's sadism, that she take the matter of her suffering into her own hands. All this makes the problem of proximity even more devastating than we might once have imagined. The film's thesis on 'goodness' therefore requires more than the woman's complicity alone. It demands that she claim as her privilege the terms of her annihilation.

A similarly unsettling account of female subjectivity is placed at the heart of the film's aesthetic agenda. In its use of handheld cameras, its disregard for conventional editing and framing, and its ubiquitous use of extreme closeups, *Breaking the Waves* endlessly quests for proximity, taking up that association of femininity and closeness in its own movement. It is as though the film takes on the difficulty, or impossibility, of pursuing a closeness to the image that it must nonetheless endlessly seek. As though the image of the over-identified female spectator is taken as something of an ideal, a figure for the film's own fantasy of unquestioning belief. As it pushes closer and closer up against the characters, as Francke puts it, 'distract[ing] and unbalanc[ing]' the film's spectators, the camera makes this endless, frantic demand for proximity the condition of watching.¹⁷ The very texture of the film is marked with Bess's delirium, and closeness to the image held up as a goal. Proximity thus harnesses the film's appeal to 'goodness' to an aesthetics of 'realism': a claim for 'goodness' and a model of aesthetics which meet in the woman at the point of her – and the film's – disintegration.

Such a negative appraisal of proximity is matched by the film's enunciation of distance. The final God's-eye-view shot that compels physical and critical distance from an intractably up-close 'realism' also announces the 'goodness' of the woman's loving sacrifice *as its truth*. Distance sacrifices the woman to the magic of a filmic reparation, distance assures us of the propriety of her voluntary death. Crucially then, the closing shot provides a sure corrective to the idea that distance would mark a feminist triumph over the woman's passivity

¹⁷ Francke, 'Breaking the Waves', p. 36.

¹⁸ Von Trier and his critics identify Dreyer's films as the locus of a cinematic history in which *Breaking the Waves* participates on a number of counts. Most obvious perhaps is the link between *Breaking the Waves* and Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, given Joan of Arc's reputation as a mystic or sacrificial object who, like Bess, makes a bid for the freedom to interpret her visions outside the authority of the church. Most significant here, however, is that critics tend to see *Breaking the Waves* as compounding mysticism with a cinematic aesthetics of 'realism'. In this sense, von Trier's belief in the ability of a film to tap into the supernatural power of human emotions is absolutely consonant with Dreyer's reputation.

¹⁹ H.D., 'Joan of Arc', reproduced in James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (eds), *Close Up 1927–1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 130–31.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

²¹ Ibid., p. 130.

²² Laura Marcus, 'The contribution of H.D. – introduction', in Donald et al. (eds), *Close Up*, p. 97. H.D.'s theory of aesthetics involves a historically specific hope that cinema would bridge the national divisions which were becoming more and more entrenched with the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s, that its magic would cure the aggression and violence of the socio-political world at a time when the worst excesses of humanity's capacity for hatred and violence were being played out on an international stage. Ibid., p. 104.

and masochism. Instead distance insists even more emphatically on Bess's rightful self-sacrifice. At the same time as it makes proximity even more negative than feminist analyses have allowed, *Breaking the Waves* also complicates any easy association of distance with empowerment. Internal to the distance preserving the woman's power is an injunction against the kinds of autonomy such power might be thought to represent. Dramatically rethinking the potentially oppositional effects of distance, this film insists that a necessary devastation runs alongside a claim for the woman's self-preservation. Death functions as a mode of possibility or means of survival, forcing together self-possession with self-annihilation, and autonomy with the utmost surrender.

H.D.'s idea of a perfect cinema

The following account of the devastating impact of a film on the body of a woman invites us to question how this difficulty might reinfect the problem of 'the female spectator'. It comes from a review of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928), written by the modernist writer H.D. and first published in *Close Up* in 1928.¹⁸ H.D. is describing a feeling of being assaulted by looking at an image of a traumatized woman:

why must my very hands feel that they are numb and raw and bleeding, clenched fists tightened, bleeding as if beating at those very impregnable mediaeval church doors? ... I think it is that we all have our Jeanne, each one of us in the secret great cavernous interior of the cathedral (if I may be fantastic) of the subconscious. Now another Jeanne strides in ... a Jeanne d'Arc that not only pretends to be real, but that is real, a Jeanne that is going to rob us of our own Jeanne. ... Why am I defiant before one of the most exquisite and consistent works of screen art and perfected craft that it has been our immeasurable privilege to witness? ... I am defiant for this reason ... I and you ... are in no need of such brutality.¹⁹

At the same time, the experience of watching this film is felt as a form of physical attack because of the frenetic pulse and flow of the camera's movement: 'Why do I have to be cut into slices by this inevitable pan-movement of the camera, these suave lines to left, up, to the right, back, all rhythmical with the remorseless rhythm of a scimitar?'.²⁰ This brutal aesthetic crosses from form and technique to encompass a reality so acute, an identification so transparent, that in the end the film fails to 'touch us', or 'take us further'.²¹ An odd criticism given H.D.'s concern with a 'realist' aesthetics of cinema – film 'can reveal ... a reality as yet unrepresented in other media' – and its potential healing properties.²² On the one hand, H.D. finds in Dreyer's film a possible consummation of her theory of cinematic aesthetics; on the other, the film is felt to dishonour a promise (it takes us 'so far' into

suffering but not 'further'). This makes sense of her claim that the film fails to 'touch us': it heaps upon its spectator the physical reality of suffering (rather than any spiritual truth). A paradox emerges here: this film produces both too much and not enough – or not the right kind of – pain. It takes us into the experience of suffering but cannot take us beyond it, to a truth at the heart of suffering. And this because the body of the spectator is arrested in its suffering, militating against the transcendence through suffering that film is supposed to enable. It is the moment of perfection that brings with it the pain of persecution.

Caught in an impasse, H.D.'s description of her suffering anticipates one point of dispute within contemporary feminist film theory. Suggesting that this film, instead of taking her 'elsewhere', takes her back to her body, H.D. repeats that long-held association of the female spectator with a closeness to the image which I have been discussing. This female spectator is too close to the reality of suffering to watch an onscreen woman suffering without herself being traumatized in the process: her pleasures bind her inexorably to her own dissolution. Textually-inspired psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship have generated similar accounts of the female spectator whose pleasures condemn her to 'complicity with an oppressive ... regime' rather than providing 'a flag to rally around'.²³ Confining the female spectator to certain pain and suffering cannot, so one argument goes, account for the way that women actually negotiate their cinematic pleasures. As if in response to this troubled question, H.D. effectively brings together the disembodied 'textual' spectator with the embodied 'empirical' spectator, and in doing so generates an inexorable – and pessimistic – link between the onscreen woman and the female spectator that hinges on a shared bodily anguish. As a female spectator in the cinema, H.D. describes identification as a means to more suffering, and proximity as a trap: she is bound and tormented by precisely what is supposed to release her from distress. Reading H.D. on this point forces us to consider again that the difficulty – the necessity – of the woman's suffering lies at the heart of a feminist theory of cinematic spectatorship.

More significantly, therefore, H.D. reveals that her enforced suffering generates a point of resistance or defiance. Precisely because it is so perfect, so real, this film attacks her, leaving her psychically bereft and utterly defiant. Why does she feel as if she herself is 'beating at those very impregnable mediaeval church doors'? Why is this female spectator subject to the same torment as Jeanne d'Arc? It is because there is on the screen 'a Jeanne d'Arc that not only pretends to be real, but that is real, *a Jeanne that is going to rob us of our own Jeanne*'.²⁴ And she adds, 'The Jeanne d'Arc of Carl Dreyer is so perfect that we feel somehow cheated'.²⁵ The film's perfection, then, its presentation of something that is 'real', not 'as if' it were real, assaults this female spectator by denying her some kind of self-determination in the matter of her own suffering. The film plagues the body of its female spectator,

²³ Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane, 'The female spectator: contexts and directions', 'The Spectatrix', *Camera Obscura*, nos 20/21 (1989), p. 8.

²⁴ H.D., 'Joan of Arc', p. 131 (my emphasis).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

denying her something that is proper to her – ‘our own Jeanne’, which ‘each one of us [has] in the secret cavernous interior of the cathedral . . . of the subconscious’.²⁶ Peculiarly, H.D. appeals to the unconscious as a guarantee of self-identity. It is in the unconscious, she suggests, that we find ‘our own Jeanne’, in the unconscious that we possess *our own* image of a woman’s suffering, an image of which we are dispossessed when we watch this film.

This association of spectatorship with dispossession and of the unconscious with a type of self-possession clearly turns on the image and experience of a woman’s suffering.²⁷ The female spectator suffers at the hands of the film not only because of her over-identification with the image, but because in this she is rendered so passive as to be robbed of something in her unconscious. And this psychic theft, felt as a form of physical brutalization, leaves the spectator bereft of an unconscious which is itself tormenting: she loses an unconscious image or representation of pain and suffering which might otherwise be owned. Thus H.D. leaves us with the figure of a female spectator demanding some manner of self-determination in the matter of her own suffering, and with a version of the unconscious as something through which to conceptualize the spectator’s self-possession in a moment of radical dispossession.

At the same time, H.D. describes her brutalization by the film in terms of her frustration with the limits it imposes on looking, limits which are felt as a dispossession of the spectator’s ability to act, to do anything about what she sees in front of her: ‘I do mind standing aside and watching and watching *and* watching and being able to do nothing’.²⁸ Not only is there the pain of too much proximity, but also of too much distance from the image. It is the spectator’s ‘watching and watching *and* watching’ which torments her, not, or not only, her captivation *in* the image. At the same time that we have a profile of the over-identified female spectator tormented by proximity, we are also presented with perhaps the logical consequence of the female spectator’s distanciation *from* the image: distress, passivity, dispossession.

Both images of the female spectator – equally abused by proximity and distance – engage that central difficulty for feminist film theory: the problem of ‘the female spectator’ deprived of anything like agency or self-determination. In her call for ownership of something felt to be proper to her, H.D. claims a right to will her own destruction: what is proper to her is the ‘destructive element’.²⁹ Two descriptions of the unconscious are relevant here: first, a general psychoanalytic description of the unconscious as a site of loss of identity (there is ‘our own Jeanne’ robbed from us by the film); second, a description of an unconscious that is destructive and resistant. Jacqueline Rose reminds us that resistance is a form of defence: in ‘psychoanalytic language, resistance as a concept is far closer to defensiveness than to freedom; you resist when you don’t want to budge’.³⁰ H.D.’s text takes us much

28 H.D., ‘Joan of Arc’, p. 132.

29 The term comes from Joseph Conrad’s book *Lord Jim* (1900) and has often been associated with literary modernism. See Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

30 Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 4–5.

closer to this understanding of resistance than to any equation of resistance with a transformative or liberatory politics. This female spectator is defiant of the film because she experiences it as an attack; her resistance is both a defence *against* psychic destructiveness and an appeal for *ownership* of that destructiveness. Robbing its spectator of an internal destructiveness without which she is fundamentally impoverished, this assault leaves the spectator demanding her right to the difficulty, the destructiveness, that lets her 'be'. In this, H.D. generates a particularly pessimistic account of female subjectivity, reimagining an autonomy or self-possession that is *necessarily* menaced by the destructiveness it is supposed to hold off. A negativity internal to female subjectivity thus comes to the fore when addressing the experience of a female spectator, her closeness to and distance from the image when an easy distinction between a 'good' and a 'bad' film no longer holds.

The degraded believer

It is not difficult to intimate the parallels between this female spectator and the negative account of female subjectivity generated by *Breaking the Waves*. But there are also significant links to be made between the two in relation to the affective dimensions of spectatorship. In her review of *Breaking the Waves*, Francke describes a similar experience of the spectator's brutalization by the film's insistent closeups of the onscreen woman's suffering, and the same pained frustration with the limits imposed by looking which we have seen in H.D.'s account. *Breaking the Waves*, Francke writes,

is a film that rolls with the emotions, that shudders with the frustration of not being able to do more than simply observe. At the same time it also repels us with just how much it can reveal. The close scrutiny of Bess's disintegration is at times so painfully raw and shocking that sometimes one doesn't want to look anymore – especially as Emily Watson's performance, in which she seems to empty herself out onto the screen, is so believable.³¹

This passage makes a link between the traumatized woman's body and the spectator's pain which is secured by the 'believability' of the actor's performance. 'Empty[ing] herself out onto the screen', Watson gives interiority over to the film itself. Even more reminiscent of H.D.'s description of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, *Breaking the Waves* 'rolls ... shudders' and 'pierce[s] skin'; it is a film in which 'the camera ... seems to be alive as it pulls audiences in ... distracts and unbalances them'.³² In this personification of film and camera, there is barely a gap between spectator and screen, little distance between the camera that 'can never get as close as it would like' and the spectator who is frustrated by 'not being able to do more than simply observe'.³³ At the same time as this spectator is so caught up in the film as to be –

³¹ Francke, 'Breaking the Waves', p. 36.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

like both it and its female protagonist – distracted and unbalanced, Francke insists that the film measures its own distance from reality: unable to get close enough to Bess and Jan, brushing at, piercing and burrowing through their skin, the camera loses hold of the image and the focus blurs. This account of failed intimacy, of the film's vision as a frenzied attack, and of 'realism' as a compulsion to make something invisible visible, vividly recalls H.D.'s comments on the failure of a film to take us beyond the brute reality of suffering. Francke also reminds us, however, 'how wrong it would be to understand the film as a realist piece', because of the 'chapter headings that punctuate it'.³⁴ At the same time as the spectator is too much inside the film, she or he is above all privy to its mechanisms *as film*, as though the film itself comments on the failed 'realism' it is nonetheless at pains to present. Attributing to the film the very self-consciousness which Collins argues it lacks, Francke's analysis instead establishes the disabling consequences of both closeness to, and distance from, the image: both signal frustration and failure, and at times become unbearable. Distance is not felt as liberating but as frustrating; and self-defence becomes unthinkable outside the compass of destructiveness. Recalling H.D.'s explanation that an enforced distance from Dreyer's film renders the female spectator even more passive and more distressed, that it forces her to claim ownership of destructiveness, Francke's description of a spectator's affective experience of *Breaking the Waves* thus comes into contact with the film's diegetic presentation of the negativity internal to female subjectivity.

The category of belief is pivotal to this coupling of spectatorship and negativity. Contradicting her suggestion that the up-close documentation of Bess's torment makes the film so 'believable', Francke later makes a link instead between belief and distance. It is historical distance, Francke suggests, that makes it easier to believe in the extent of women's disempowerment the film depicts: 'Setting the film during a period when women's status was beginning to shift authenticates Bess's story. It would be harder to believe in a community so authoritarian if it was meant to be in the Scotland of the 1990s (though of course such patriarchal attitudes still exist'.³⁵ Contrasting starkly with the 'believability' of Watson's performance, this is an appeal to the more familiar (and here eminently conscious) practice of a cinematic 'suspension of disbelief'. And yet *Breaking the Waves* does not allow for distance to equate with anything like measured equanimity or conscious judgement. Distance comes finally – and Francke confirms it – to corroborate the truth and goodness of Bess's self-sacrifice in the name of love. Invoking distance testifies – paradoxically – to the power and veracity of unmitigated faith. In this, *Breaking the Waves* collapses any 'suspension of disbelief' into utter credulousness. It is a 'belief' that necessarily binds the woman's power to her voluntary self-destruction. Without destructiveness, without the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

invocation of absolute faith through which it is approved, the woman's power and identity are unthinkable.

A fundamental negativity in the matter of female subjectivity is thus made inseparable from this film's insistence on the propriety, the goodness, of a mode of believing hitherto discussed as the singular terrain of 'the female spectator'. Subjectivity and dispossession, autonomy and degradation, are each forced together at the precise point the film engages distance to make a firm claim for the woman's power. Responses to the film may well invoke distance as a defensive manoeuvre expected to provide a critical or political position. And yet distance recognizes, even multiplies, the experience of suffering it is meant to annul. Either way, *Breaking the Waves* insists that the very position presumed to enable a 'feminist' analysis gives way to its inverse – the truly credulous spectator, quite literally 'abused by the diegesis'. The case for the woman's power and influence hinges not only on a necessary destructiveness at the heart of female subjectivity. It also *requires* the degraded believer. Without her abandonment to utter credulousness, it would seem that there is no way of venturing a political analysis at all.

Kleinian negativity

We might well accuse Klein of believing against the odds in a 'goodness' uncontaminated by violence or destructiveness. On the one hand, her work reveals dramatically the insurmountable power and primacy of violence, hatred and destructiveness in the human psyche. And yet she insists that love too is primary, genuine and rooted in a deeply felt need to honour the 'good'. Love is not, she maintains, merely the inevitable and defensive outcome of a world threatened by the malevolence of its objects. An intractable tension between these two positions plays itself out in Klein's writings on reparation. Acts of reparation, or doing good, provide the grounds for psychic integration, establishing a kind of ethics of social and cultural life. But these acts are precarious, and the subjectivities and cultural forms to which they are – perhaps wishfully – attached are forever marked with uncertainty.

Klein theorizes reparation as a process by which the child seeks to make good the damage it has done to its objects in phantasy. Immediately this introduces a structural contradiction: if reparation defends against the consequences of destructiveness, then doing good depends upon destructiveness as much as it aims to put right its injuries. As I have shown, *Breaking the Waves* insists on just such a narrative. It requires the woman as guarantee of a genuine and powerful goodness, and simultaneously as source of the destructive anxiety it hopes to efface. By this double movement, the film harnesses a belief in 'the good' to an account of a female subjectivity devastated by the mechanisms that let it 'be'. A similarly pessimistic version of female subjectivity runs alongside a challenge to the obvious integrity

of ‘the good’ in Klein’s theory of reparation. In Klein’s text as in *Breaking the Waves*, the issue of a woman’s self-sacrifice, and its central role in securing a belief in genuine ‘goodness’, brings us into direct contact with negativity.

We can best define negativity by addressing two contrary accounts of reparation held in tension in Klein: her theory of a ‘genuine’ reparation in the service of the object, and her insistence that reparation is a defence against anxiety. Negativity comes to light starkly when Klein aims to authenticate a claim that reparation signals a genuine urge to do good. Hoping to establish love as a primary impulse, just like hatred, she insists that they engage ‘simultaneously contradictory wishes in the unconscious mind’.³⁶ To substantiate, she explains that a child may ‘feel guilty if he becomes his mother’s favourite and thereby causes his father and siblings to be neglected by her’ not only because ‘the child’s desires [and] destructive impulses’ are ‘unlimited’, but also because ‘at the same time he … has … opposite tendencies; he also wishes to give [his brothers and sisters] love and make reparation’.³⁷ And she continues: ‘He himself actually wants to be restrained by the adults around him in his aggression and selfishness, because if these are given free rein he is caused suffering by the pain of remorse and unworthiness’.³⁸ At first Klein insists on the child’s inherent capacity for love, suggesting that he is more concerned with the others’ well-being than his own. Precisely in establishing this premiss, however, Klein reveals all the more acutely that reparation originates in destructiveness: the child’s compassionate feelings are caused by the anxiety attendant on his belief in the omnipotence of his destructive wishes. The child wants to be restrained not simply because his destructiveness is so unlimited as to threaten his siblings, but primarily because that destructiveness will cause the child himself more suffering. We cannot therefore easily assume that his remorseful suffering, or the pain of ‘unworthiness’, derives from any kind of innate ethical sense. The complex web of contradictions through which Klein attempts to establish love as primary makes it impossible to do so.

This same tension between a tendency to self-effacement in the name of love and an account of love as a veil for defensive self-preservation is key to the woman’s role in reparation. On the one hand, women are inherently self-sacrificing in the name of love. Women possess ‘a great capacity, which is not based merely on an overcompensation, for disregarding their own wishes and devoting themselves with self-sacrifice to ethical and social tasks’.³⁹ The woman is the bedrock, we might say, of a culture based on an ethics of love and compassion. Although it may be marshalled here to ratify a theory of ‘genuine sympathy with other people’ and ‘a strong feeling of … concern for them’, elsewhere this ‘urge to make sacrifices’ motivates acts of reparation instead towards ‘loved people who in phantasy have been harmed or destroyed’.⁴⁰ So powerful are the destructive tendencies that

³⁶ Melanie Klein, ‘Love guilt and reparation’ (1937), in Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921–1945* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 316.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Melanie Klein, ‘Early stages of the Oedipus complex’ (1928), in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, p. 195 (my emphasis).

⁴⁰ Klein, ‘Love, guilt and reparation’, p. 311.

Klein simply cannot sustain an account of reparation driven by a genuine concern for loved objects. Thus a simple faith in women's natural capacity for sacrifice acts as a much needed gloss on the internal inconsistencies of the concept of reparation. Only Klein at her most ideologically conservative can safeguard a belief in reparation as a sign of genuine human compassion. The stakes for the woman are all too clear: naturalizing her sacrificial qualities displaces any recognition of the woman's violence and aggression onto an approval of her capacity for self-damage.

On the other hand the woman stands as the very principle of destructiveness, and her attempts at reparation fracture into an account of the destruction of a loved object in the name of self-preservation. Making reparation to her mother for the damage done to her in phantasy, the woman also repairs her own fantasized destruction by the mother: 'Because of the destructive tendencies once directed by her against the mother's body ... and against the children in the womb, the girl anticipates retribution in the form of destruction of her own capacity for motherhood'.⁴¹ This is not a description of a self-effacing capacity for love, but an account of love's emergence from the need for self-preservation in the face of an overwhelming destructiveness.

On this reading, then, the woman is so concerned with the threat of attack on her own body that she seeks to make reparation to her mother for the damage done to her. And on another, the woman is so naturally predisposed to make reparation by way of self-sacrifice that she takes possession of the means of her own destruction. In both cases, self-defence is mixed with self-destruction, and goodness menaced by a destructiveness which yet gives voice to the woman's power. The same act of reparation does just as well for self-preservation as for self-destruction. There is a clear link between Klein's text and *Breaking the Waves* on this point: both make the woman pay for a destructiveness she is meant to have held at bay; both guarantee a necessary or constitutive devastation when making a claim for the woman's self-preservation.

Notwithstanding experiences of destructive hostility and persecution, a child's relation to an ideal object, Klein maintains, enables it finally to believe in its own goodness and in the world's benevolence. Eventually the child will find an object which is so good that it will help sustain him, enabling him to deny the existence of the 'bad' objects which in unconscious phantasy persecute and threaten to destroy him. But this is a defensive faith in goodness which entails much more than the child has bargained for:

Omnipotent denial of the existence of the bad object and of the painful situation is in the unconscious equal to annihilation by the destructive impulse. It is, however, not only a situation and an object that are denied and annihilated – it is *an object-relation* which

⁴¹ Klein, 'Early stages of the Oedipus complex', p. 194.

42 Melanie Klein, 'Notes on some schizoid mechanisms', in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 7.

suffers this fate; and therefore a part of the ego . . . is denied and annihilated as well.⁴²

The very strategy the infant has for preserving itself against the threat of destruction leads it closer to the scene of its annihilation. Every step towards self-preservation leads to the risk of self-annihilation, each move towards autonomy from the destructive tendencies leads straight back into their clutches. On this reading, violence and destructiveness give meaning to all that is good, vividly threatening the subject they also enable and preserve. This is a desperate attempt to sustain a belief in goodness, and it gives expression again to the negativity we have seen emerge in Klein's account of the woman's role in reparation. There, in an appeal to goodness and its healing powers, a woman's bids for self-preservation give way to the destructiveness they expect to diminish.

A series of correspondences between Klein's work and *Breaking the Waves* thus turns on the notion of negativity, the intractable psychic violence which threatens the very subjectivity it also generates and sustains. The challenge posed by *Breaking the Waves* to positive feminist accounts of female subjectivity – that the 'good' woman bears the burden of destructiveness, that a belief in the woman's power necessitates her surrender – takes us to the heart of the negativity that Klein's psychoanalysis discloses. Discovering that the very thing that sustains is what threatens it, the itinerary of the Kleinian child also traces a dynamic which is, as we shall see, at the heart of contemporary feminism, at the crux of feminist encounters with filmic objects it would want to denounce.

Loving the cinema: negativity and 'the female spectator'

It will be instructive here to consider a moment from Metz's writings: in order to explain the politics of film theory he too links together goodness and belief. The film theoretician must, he argues, preserve a film inside himself as a 'good' object so as to unpick the ideological inflections of the love relationship cinema impels. If a film is 'good', it is also believable, yet this 'belief' cuts two ways: it secures ideological effectivity as much as it does ideological critique. To be more precise, the film theoretician must maintain a 'somewhat acrobatic' balance between loving the object and remaining uncompromised by the threat of a retreat into its charms.⁴³ 'To be a theoretician of the cinema, one should ideally no longer love the cinema and yet still love it: have loved it a lot and only have detached oneself from it'.⁴⁴ Critical distance is not opposed to proximity or absorption, but rather depends upon it, must have direct access to the experience of it. In this view, the politically engaged critic preserves a fundamental connection to that 'degraded believer', she or he who loves the film to the point of distraction, conspiring with 'the film's own ideological inspiration'.⁴⁵

43 Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, p. 15.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p. 14.

As I have shown, *Breaking the Waves* invokes this most abused and repressed part of the cinema spectator by announcing the truth of Bess's belief without a doubt in the final shot. And making the woman's autonomy and power thereby inseparable from her destructiveness and annihilation, the film challenges a feminist politics of self-identity. But reading across the interplay of goodness, love and belief that moves between Metz's text and *Breaking the Waves* brings us into contact with a further challenge for feminism. One who believes in – who loves – the very cinema that condemns her to passivity and dispossession might well provide the condition of possibility for feminist film theory's critical endeavours.

Published in 1989, Laura Mulvey's retrospective commentary on the origins of the concept of 'the female spectator' confirms this very proposition. There Mulvey claims that 'the female spectator' arose as 'a dilemma within myself', a way of thinking through her captivation by a cinema whose pleasures agitate resolutely against feminist aims.⁴⁶ The female spectator emerges in the struggle between political affiliations and cinematic pleasures, between a conscious identification against, and an unconscious surrender to, the images of this cinema:

Under the influence of the Women's Movement, my experience of cinema changed, and I became aware of the 'female spectator' first as a dilemma within myself. Until then, I had loved Hollywood films, more or less without question. . . . Then feminism intervened, like an insistent tug at one's sleeve, breaking the spell by drawing attention to the problems posed by the images of women on the screen, so that sometimes films that had previously thrilled me or moved me to tears simply turned into irritants before my eyes.⁴⁷

The work of feminist film theory begins here, in the 'jolt in consciousness' that forces this female spectator to acknowledge her complicity, her surrender, to the pleasures of a system in which she, now, has no desire to recognize herself.⁴⁸ Mulvey appears to distinguish clearly between two modes of spectatorship, between autonomy and surrender, distanciation and implication. And yet how could she even begin to articulate her detachment without that first image of capitulation ('I had loved Hollywood films . . . without question')? The work of the feminist film theoretician begins, that is, when feminism forces this female spectator to acknowledge and probe the terms of her pleasurable surrender to the loved object's charms. The concept of 'the female spectator' comes into being by giving voice to the simultaneous requirement *for* and wrecking *of* a self-present identity for women.

Crucially, there is something negative at the heart of this feminist endeavour, something akin to what Rose once called the purchase of psychoanalysis *for* feminism: it points to a permanent difficulty at the point of identity for women.⁴⁹ More recent commentators, however, have questioned the compromises to identity associated with textually inspired psychoanalytic work on spectatorship as ultimately antipathetic

⁴⁶ Laura Mulvey, untitled entry to 'The Spectatrix', p. 248.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 248–9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁴⁹ See Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction: feminism and the psychic', pp. 1–23; 'Femininity and its discontents', pp. 83–103; both in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (New York, NY and London: Verso, 1986).

⁵⁰ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 23 (italics mine).

⁵¹ Doane, untitled entry to 'The Spectatrix', p. 143; Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p. 103.

⁵² Vicky Lebeau, *Lost Angels: Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 37.

⁵³ Mulvey, untitled entry to 'The Spectatrix', p. 249.

⁵⁴ Lebeau, *Lost Angels*, p. 37.

to feminist aims. If, for example, psychoanalytical analyses fail to address the experiences and pleasures of women *in the audience*, falling back onto an account that invalidates active female desire, they may well *disturb* the assumed project of feminist film theory. Jackie Stacey, for example, has made a powerful critique of the 'troubling division between film theory and cinema audiences' that makes actual women 'uninteresting to the feminist film critic'.⁵⁰ That point of dispute would seem inevitable: as the 'vanishing point of a textual configuration', the concept of 'the female spectator' is at odds with a feminist appeal to 'a new sureness of identity for women'.⁵¹

But Mulvey's retrospective puts that apparently disregarded woman in the audience right back into the frame: women's pleasures were indeed the impetus for the psychoanalytic work accused of excluding women from feminist consideration. This insight invites us to articulate the problem of the female spectator differently. For the female spectator brings into view the indissociability of a feminist criticism motivated by a concern with women's pleasures from the pessimistic conclusions it draws about female subjectivity. An intolerable version of subjectivity acts as the very condition of feminist enquiry; and the feminist determination to empower women throws up the horrendous spectre of passivity, complicity and dispossession it hopes to overcome.

Situating the female spectator in the context of a lost love relationship, Mulvey also suggests that critical or political distances are derived, and cannot be kept apart, from the fantasies she would hope to interrogate. This dilemma generated by the female spectator and made central to feminist film theory is, as Vicky Lebeau has pointed out, inseparable from a narrative of mourning.⁵² 'A transition from fascination with the cinema to fascination with the mechanics of fascination with the cinema' was, 'as you might expect ... accompanied by a sense of sadness and loss'.⁵³ This mourning for a lost love object – Hollywood cinema – and lost pleasures – the thrills, the tears – is only partly mitigated by the compensations feminist film theory can offer. As Lebeau puts it, 'there is something here that a woman who loves the pleasures of cinema cannot give up'.⁵⁴ An unresolvable dilemma emerges: the female spectator is cast as an active, critical feminist theorist, but left mourning the pleasures of a type of subjective impoverishment. In this, Mulvey narrates a history in which feminist film theory cannot repair the devastations of loss: spectatorship emerges as a conscious critical activity that unmasks the very mechanisms of pleasure from which it cannot, ultimately, be dislodged. Activity may well delight in a way that passivity cannot, but it can never quite dispatch that craving for the 'lesser' pleasure.

This is remarkably reminiscent of Metz's claim for the film theoretician's relation to his loved objects, his insistence that complicity with cinema's ideological machine grounds its critique. In Mulvey's text, a feminist claims *as her own* an intolerable version of female subjectivity – without those compromising pleasures and

complicities, resistance is unthinkable. At its moment of inception, the female spectator forces a claim for ownership of destructiveness, something that has often been rejected as outside the scope of feminist concern. Mulvey gives voice to a love that entails self-destructiveness, and makes the problem internal to feminism's own critical enterprises. On this reading, Mulvey claims negativity *for* feminism, and in exactly the sense I have drawn from Klein. Negativity articulates the intractable violence that situates you (feminist) in a structure that dispossesses you, a structure you must also oppose. It is only by finding an awkward, momentary place within that structure that you can take up a position of resistance, or find another voice, at all.

In pointing to these correspondences, I have begun to trace what might be at stake for feminist film theory in an attention to its own fantasies and cherished hopes. Against the wish for a female spectator free of the compromises of pleasure and surrender, emerges the destructiveness and violence without which she, in a sense, has no meaning. This marks the need for a broader return to debates that relegate the negative conditions of female spectatorship to the operations of a patriarchal machine. Forcing an encounter between 'the female spectator' and a Klein unable to sustain a theory of a goodness free from destructiveness, *Breaking the Waves* challenges us to countenance negativity as a constitutive condition of feminist film theory, as a mode of feminist possibility that puts at risk precisely the articulation of female subjectivity it also compels.

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Early, classical and modern cinema: absorption and theatricality

RICHARD RUSHTON

Impossible constructions do exist in the cinema.
Christian Metz

Consider one of the many great moments from Godard's films: in *Pierrot le fou* (1965), Pierrot and Marianne are speeding along the road in a large convertible as they flee the scene of their latest escapade and turn their attention to finding Marianne's brother. The audience views the excited conversation they are having from behind their heads until Pierrot suddenly turns towards the camera and says, 'See! Fun is all she wants.' Marianne responds to this strange outburst by asking Pierrot, 'Who are you talking to?'. He replies, 'The audience'.

The amusing skill and simplicity with which Godard's film here steps between two modes of audience engagement deserves comment. On the one hand, the audience is excited and absorbed by the thrilling predicament in which Pierrot and Marianne find themselves: that is, the audience follows and is caught up in the activities of the main characters, and probably shares much of the excitement and tension experienced by them during their getaway. On the other hand, the audience's absorption in the action is simultaneously upset: the audience playfully realizes that 'it's only a film', and is made aware of the convention or conventionalism of being caught up in these events. The audience, at this moment, sees the film 'being itself' rather than being merely the vehicle for a good story or a good chase. In other words, the film is being reflexive. The audience is made aware that, alas, it is composed only of spectators engaged in the rather frivolous activity of watching moving images projected onto a screen – and

perhaps these spectators will laugh because they know they have been seduced by the imaginary institution of the cinema.

These two moments – *first*, of almost unconsciously looking at the screen and of being absorbed by the representations therein; and *second*, of being made aware of the act of looking, of being consciously aware that what is on screen is not a real story, but a very conventionalized entertainment apparatus – may be accurately described as moments of *absorption* in the first instance, and of *theatricality* in the latter. *Absorption* is the term used by the art historian Michael Fried to characterize works of art that try to present themselves as though they are not explicitly intended to be viewed by an audience.¹ The view of the audience is therefore one of *absorption* because the audience becomes absorbed by the scene at which they look; the audience is drawn into the drama that is depicted, as indeed it is drawn into the drama of Pierrot and Marianne on the run from their outrageous past acts. *Theatricality*, on the other hand, is the term used by Fried to denote those works of art that are conscious of, and which actively acknowledge, being looked at; they demonstrate to the audience that they are mere artefacts, made-up objects that are being paraded before an audience. Pierrot, with his active acknowledgment of the audience's eye (and ear), turns the film, at this moment, into one that is theatrical.

These terms, *absorption* and *theatricality*, are not ones that are usually applied to the cinema. Nevertheless, in his landmark essay 'Art and objecthood', Fried briefly mentions that cinema is inherently free from *theatricality*.

There is . . . one art that, by its very nature, escapes theater entirely – the movies. [Fried adds a footnote here: Exactly how movies escape theater is a difficult question, and there is no doubt a phenomenology of the cinema that concentrated on the similarities and differences between it and stage drama – e.g., that in the movies the actors are not physically present, the film itself is projected *away* from us, and the screen is experienced as a kind of object existing in a specific physical relation to us – would be rewarding.] This helps explain why movies in general, including frankly appalling ones, are acceptable to modern sensibilities.²

It is not my aim here to respond to Fried's request for a phenomenological examination of the cinematic experience,³ it is rather to take his suggestions on film and theatricality seriously, for he uses a language and concepts that are a step removed from the traditions and clichés that inform contemporary film studies and film theory. Fried's observations on theatricality have the possibility therefore of encouraging new ways of thinking about cinema and of seeing old debates in a new light. This is especially the case with issues of spectatorship and the audience's relation to the cinematic experience.

1 Michael Fried's boldest and most succinct statement on theatricality occurs in 'Art and objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), but it is a topic that has occupied his entire intellectual career. See *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980); *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and *Manet's Modernism, or, the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

2 Fried, 'Art and objecthood', pp. 164, 171 fn 20.
3 Readers may wish to see my 'Cinema's double: some reflections on Metz', *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2002), pp. 107–18, which approaches some of the questions Fried puts forward, as does Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye: a Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1979) is influenced in significant ways by Fried.

Fried is extremely critical of artworks that are wholly devoted to the pursuit of theatricality. For him, absorptive works of art involve a sophistication of engagement which is denied by theatrical artworks. Absorption is very much a desirable and admirable goal of the artwork, while the aim of theatricality is inherently undesirable. Working from this distinction, it may be possible to outline some forms of cinema that are wholly devoted to theatricality and some that tend more towards absorption. In fact, there *is* one form of cinema that has been explicitly theorized as theatrical: the ‘cinema of attractions’. The notion of the cinema of attractions is one that overtly celebrates theatricality, and it is one of my aims in this essay to attempt a critique of this notion by way of Fried’s distinction.

What, however, does Fried mean by theatricality? Recourse to a dictionary is not out of place here, as *theatrical* is defined in one as ‘exaggerated and affected in manner or behaviour’.⁴ The *OED* refers to ‘theatrical’ as that which is ‘extravagantly or irrelevantly histrionic; “stagy”, calculated for display, showy, spectacular’.⁵ Any artwork that attempts to draw attention to itself, then, in an ‘exaggerated and affected manner’ may be said to be theatrical. Theatrical artworks are those that attempt to attract their audience by effectively proclaiming ‘look at me!’ – to a certain degree, this is what Pierrot does when he addresses the audience (at the very least he is acknowledging that he is being looked at). Theatrical artworks explicitly address their audience – their *beholders* – in order to announce themselves as worthy of attention.

Against theatricality, the claim that Fried makes for the project of modern art is that it is (or was) *anti-theatrical*. The project of modern art was that it did not explicitly draw attention to the fact that it was being looked at, that it not advertise the fact that it was made to be beheld. For Fried, then, the modern artwork is *introverted*: it is concerned with itself, with its own workings and its own inner questionings. The modern artwork is thus to be considered an object that can stand on its own, an object that relies on the careful attention and concentration of the beholder–investigator. Such artworks grant no importance to the beholder. Rather, it is the beholder who must discover, by means of investigation, comprehension and interpretation, the importance of the artwork entirely *within* the artwork.

Towards the end of the 1960s, with the rise of minimalist art, Fried felt that the anti-theatrical, modernist tradition was coming to an end; or, at least, that it was under threat from what was to be a new age of theatricality. Fried looked to one of the foremost practitioners and advocates of minimalism, Robert Morris, in order to explain the change that was occurring. Morris had thought that in all art prior to minimalism, what was to be appreciated in the artwork resided wholly within the artwork itself, in the contours, colours and puzzles located on or in the work. With theatrical art – such as minimalism – the experience of the artwork was very different from this. It was typified

⁴ *Collins English Dictionary*, third Australian edition (Sydney: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 1597.

⁵ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, volume XVII (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 883.

6 Fried, 'Art and objecthood', p. 153.

7 Ibid., p. 158.

8 Ibid., p. 159.

9 See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1973).

10 Joan Copjec has observed some similarities between absorption and voyeurism. See 'The invention of crying and the antitheatrics of the act', in *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), originally published as 'More! From melodrama to magnitude', in Janet Bergstrom (ed.), *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis/Parallel Histories* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

11 Fried, 'Art and objecthood', p. 164. On the nature of cinema's automatism, see Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ch. 14.

by the experience of 'an object in a *situation*, one that, virtually by definition *includes the beholder*'.⁶ Instead of the artwork's inner workings and questionings being of importance, what Fried perceived was that it was now the *explicit situation invoked by the work for the beholder* that was becoming paramount.

Fried's most pressing example of this kind of theatrical experience came from the artist Tony Smith. Smith took a car ride on an unfinished section of a new freeway and believed that this experience did something for him that artworks had never done: 'This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done.' Smith's clinching line was that 'there is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it'.⁷ In the case of such theatre or theatrical art, asserts Fried, 'the object is, so to speak, *replaced* by something': a situation, an experience.⁸ So perhaps at its simplest, the distinction between absorption and theatricality centres on the way the viewer looks at the artwork: with absorption it is as if the viewer *goes into* the painting, while with theatricality it is as if the painting *comes out to* the viewer so as to surround the viewer in a 'situation'.

What I first want to suggest is that Fried's distinction between absorption and theatricality bears a very close relation to a distinction established many years ago in film theory: the distinction between *voyeurism* and *exhibitionism*.⁹ Voyeurism is absorptive and anti-theatrical, while exhibitionism is theatrical. It is this distinction between voyeurism-absorption and theatricality-exhibitionism that will form the basic coordinates of my argument.¹⁰

However, before these distinctions are investigated in depth, it would be wise to heed some of Fried's further comments on the cinema. If films, for Fried, by and large avoid theatricality, then Fried is also careful to qualify and downgrade the way in which films achieve this avoidance:

Because cinema escapes theater – automatically, as it were – it provides a welcome and absorbing refuge to sensibilities at war with theater and theatricality. At the same time, the automatic, guaranteed character of the refuge – more accurately, the fact that what is provided is a refuge from theater and not a triumph over it, absorption not conviction – means that the cinema, even at its most experimental, is not a modernist art.¹¹

So cinema does not have it all its own way: movies are *non-theatrical* rather than anti-theatrical. In what follows, I seek to take Fried's claims seriously for there is much that is valuable in them. And while my approach may be somewhat programmatic and prone to generalization, I would nonetheless contend that the degree of debate these

generalizations have the capacity to produce far outweighs the shortcomings of any schematic approach. The remainder of this article is therefore devoted to charting the following distinctions:

(a) *Non-theatrical cinema*: Non-theatrical cinema is that form of cinema that has been variously theorized as 'classical fiction cinema' or 'classical narrative cinema', and which is typified by Hollywood cinema. Films of this kind are characteristically beheld by the audience in a state of *absorption*: the characters in a classical fiction film do not acknowledge the presence of the audience and therefore the audience members can believe that they are invisibly, secretly watching events unfold before them.

(b) *Theatrical cinema*: Theatrical cinema includes films that are exhibitionist, that is, films that confront the audience in the form of trick effects, gripping chases, spectacular stunts, and demonstrations of events 'that could only ever happen on film'. This is not in any way a new type of cinema (that of the contemporary special effects cinema); it can in fact be associated with the oldest type of cinema – what Tom Gunning and others have called 'the cinema of attractions'.¹²

(c) *Anti-theatrical cinema*: Anti-theatrical cinema is that form of cinema which takes neither absorption or theatricality for granted. It is that form of filmmaking which in many circles is referred to as 'modern' cinema, and which I believe is best exemplified by the films of Eisenstein and Godard. It is a form of cinema that is aware both of the limitations and possibilities posed by the absorption/theatricality distinction.

¹² On the relationship between early cinema and contemporary special effects films, see Miriam Hansen, 'Early cinema, late cinema: transformations of the public sphere', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1993).

¹³ See Gunning's study of the development of narrative methods in D.W. Griffith's films, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: the Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Christian Metz, 'The imaginary signifier', in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 63.

¹⁵ John B. Rathbun, 'Motion picture making and exhibition', *Motionography*, vol. 9, no. 13 (1913), p. 471; quoted in Kristin Thompson, 'Classical narrative space and the spectator's attention', in Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 214.

¹⁶ Thompson, 'Classical narrative space', p. 214.

Very early in its history the cinema established itself chiefly as a narrative form, though this was by no means inevitable.¹³ By the time American films rose to worldwide prominence, a definitive narrative style was formed, and was more or less solidly in place by 1917, a little over twenty years after the first film screenings. This style, which in time would become the 'classical Hollywood style', brought with it a cinema spectator who was transported to a secret dreamworld of images, a spectator who spied at the images on screen as if through a keyhole,¹⁴ through a 'knot hole in the fence'.¹⁵ According to Kristin Thompson, 'There arose the enduring Hollywood image of the spectator as an invisible onlooker present on the scene [of the film's action]'. Thompson adds that 'the basic idea of creating the spectator as an invisible onlooker at the ideal vantage point underlies the development of the classical system'.¹⁶

In the theorization of cinema, especially the theories of the 1970s and 1980s that were grounded in psychoanalysis, this invisible spectator came to be thought of as a *voyeur*, and the ideal spectator was one who was likely to become absorbed into the dramatic action of a film, to be carried away by the filmic narrative and its characters. Laura Mulvey, in her essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', made

explicit the link between the spectator's invisibility and the psychoanalytically-inspired notion of the voyeuristic onlooker: 'the mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation, and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy'. In addition, 'Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world'.¹⁷

These arguments on cinema spectatorship have certainly been well rehearsed and well challenged. Fried's notion of absorption can, nevertheless, be brought to these debates on cinematic voyeurism with fruitful consequences, for, more than anything else, the experience of absorption in the relation between painting and beholder is one in which the beholder feels as though she/he is looking in on a private world. In paintings whose quest is for the ideal of absorption, any figures depicted on the canvas are typically represented as themselves absorbed in an activity of some kind; for example, reading a book or playing a card game (one of the chief examples for Fried was Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin's *The Card Castle* [1740]). But even more important than this is the ideal that any figures represented on the canvas must in no way hint that they are being observed, for this would upset the notion that the beholder is being absorbed into the drama that is depicted on (or *in*) the canvas.

All of this may seem straightforward enough, but Fried's notion of absorption takes a rather complicated turn in his book on Courbet, *Courbet's Realism*, for it is in this book that he introduces a notion of *embodiedness*. A contrast Fried makes between the approach of Caravaggio in his *Supper at Emmaus* (1597) and Courbet's approach proves illuminating. Caravaggio's painting – which is far more *theatrical* than *absorptive* – pushes the figures and the action of the picture towards the beholder, so that the painting almost attempts to jump out of itself and enter the space of the beholder who stands before it. The foreshortened arms of Christ in the centre of the picture, as well as the outstretched arms of one of the disciples, contribute to a kind of wide-angle lens effect, so that the image virtually extends into the space of the beholder.¹⁸

Courbet's works do something quite different. Rather than pushing themselves upon the beholder, they invite the beholder *into* the painting; they pull the beholder into the drama being depicted on the canvas. Whereas the perspectival effect of the Caravaggio is tantalizing for the eye of the beholder, Courbet's absorptive settings engage not only the eye of the beholder, but her/his body as well. Indeed, according to Fried, Courbet's aim was to eradicate the distance that separated the beholder from the painting so that they could somehow 'be merged in a single quasi-corporeal entity'.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', p. 9.

¹⁸ In a more recent article on Caravaggio, Fried's assessment is somewhat different. Fried now speaks of an aesthetic of *immersion* in Caravaggio's works, especially in those works which suggest self-portraiture. See 'Thoughts on Caravaggio', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1997).

¹⁹ *Courbet's Realism*, p. 131.

Of course this is physically impossible, but it is not impossible imaginatively (as in a reverie or dream). It may be worth conceiving of this in terms of a kind of imaginative splitting, for much of Fried's argument in *Courbet's Realism* relies on examining a dual relation that is set up between the painting and the beholder. This dual relation is certainly complex, but it is an essential aspect of the absorptive work of art (while it also signifies the impossibility of complete absorption). Typically, the beholder must take up (at least) two relations to Courbet's canvases: the beholder's seeking of the painting, and the painting's seeking of the beholder. A clear example of this occurs in Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–50) in which Fried identifies two centres or two points of focus. There is, first of all, an open grave right at the front and in the centre of the painting which draws in – *absorbs* – the beholder; this is the beholder's seeking of the painting. Secondly, there is the man carrying the crucifix, a man who, of all things, *gazes directly at the beholder*. This latter figure is the point where the painting is seeking the beholder. This dialectic between painting and beholder is effectively the limit-point of Courbet's project: the point at which the beholder's desire to be immersed corporeally in the painting exists simultaneously alongside the fact that the beholder remains objectively outside the painting.

Absorption, therefore, is never merely absorption pure and simple, for the beholder is caught up in the tension of both wanting to be corporeally fused with the artwork, while also simultaneously remaining outside the work. Absorption may therefore be best described as a form of splitting: one part of the beholder's activity focuses on being lost and absorbed into the work while another aspect remains standing back as if secondarily or objectively remaining distanced from the work. A similarly tense dialectic also occurs for the so-called 'ideal' spectator in the cinema: the cinema spectator is ideal insofar as she/he is characterized by an imaginary splitting or 'doubling'²⁰ – this is why Mulvey (and other writers during the 1970s) insist that voyeurism goes hand-in-hand with a distancing or separation from the screen. (Hitchcock's *Rear Window* [1954] brilliantly demonstrates the separation necessary to the tension of voyeuristic absorption.) The dream of being carried away is made possible by the separation which therefore makes such carrying away precisely *impossible*, in the same way as the quest for absorption in modernist painting could only ever be realized in terms of its own impossibility, an impossibility that Courbet demonstrates magnificently. Impossibility should not in this case be dismissed as failure – far from it. The split or doubled nature of cinema as much as absorptive art is what makes these art forms so rewarding. An example will clarify these issues.

Early in John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln* (1939), Lincoln (Henry Fonda) is strolling by the river idly talking with his sweetheart, Ann. The scene is an efficiently composed example of the Hollywood style, and it carries with it all the hallmarks of classical narrative cinema,

²⁰ See Rushton, 'Cinema's double'.

Pauline Moore as Ann and Henry Fonda as Lincoln, in *Young Mr Lincoln* (John Ford, 1939). Picture courtesy: British Film Institute.



specifically the fact that the audience views this very private romantic moment in a mode of absorption: the characters do not address the camera, and the audience voyeuristically spies on this tender moment of courting. Moreover, as the editors of *Cahiers du cinéma* pointed out in a famous analysis of *Young Mr Lincoln*, this film is one that carries with it an extraordinary imaginary investment, for this is the great Lincoln that the film is representing, so the audience's imaginary experience of the film is already necessary for its effect (an effect that *Cahiers*' editors regarded as resolutely mythical).²¹ Much of the film's effectiveness is based on its audience's pre-prepared imaginary vision and belief of who Lincoln was and of his historical importance. Most (if not all) classical narrative films establish expectations for their audience – they create a space in the audience's imaginary – that will be more or less fulfilled by the film as it unfolds, so *Young Mr Lincoln* should not be seen as in any way exceptional in this regard.

However, as much as audiences may become absorbed by this scene, there are certain points which prevent them from being entirely carried away by it. To put it bluntly, the scene is far too stagy, almost estranging in a Brechtian sense, inasmuch as these characters *perform their roles*. This is especially the case with Henry Fonda's portrayal of Lincoln: he seems to acknowledge the camera as much as he addresses Ann, and perhaps more so. He makes the audience utterly aware that he is acting, that he is playing a role (the role of a humble, but loving, down-to-earth gentleman-farmer, a 'boy next door', as it were, in addition to the fact that he is the 'great' Lincoln). But this understanding or confidence or 'agreement' that Fonda has with the audience makes the scene all the more convincing, because it bolsters the imaginary contact the film has with the audience. The scene effectively posits that it desires absorption, but is also conscious of this

²¹ The editors of *Cahiers du cinéma*, 'John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods, Volume I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 493–529.

fact that it desires absorption; that absorption in itself is not a pure and simple matter of being carried away (of being *absorbed*), but rather also hinges on an open acknowledgement of the film's and the audience's absorptive desire. This scene (and the entire film, I would argue) is therefore both absorptive and theatrical – *it contains theatricality as much as it contains absorption*, just like the dual nature of Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*. The characters are presenting to us a kind of fabrication of their feelings for each other (though this fabrication is at all times genuine). This is the true genius of the scene; it is utterly compressed, but is no less convincing because of that: Lincoln's and Ann's love for one another is entirely convincing on the basis of the briefest of conversations.

The key impression to be gathered from this scene is its dual mode of watching. The audience *knows* it is a film – the staginess of the acting (the way that Fonda presents his character to the viewer) assures us of this, and at these moments the film *comes out to* the viewer (Fonda's gestures assure viewers that he knows he is being looked at) and is surely theatrical, or at least partially so. But the scene is also absorptive: the somewhat magical ability of cinema to allow spectators into such private moments is one of its most enduring qualities.

Is it going too far to imply, as with Fried's summation of Courbet's paintings, that the voyeuristic mode of absorption typically associated with the 'classical narrative cinema' is one that tries to achieve absorption, but which is also conscious of the impossibility of this quest? Perhaps the most logical conclusion is one that sees the classical cinema as a mode that is destined to hover between absorption and theatricality while often presenting both simultaneously. On these grounds, I would have to agree with Fried that the cinema – the classical narrative cinema, at any rate – is *non-theatrical* rather than being purely absorptive and anti-theatrical. The mode of viewing in the classical cinema is therefore one which establishes a tense dialectic between the spectator's seeking of the film, that is, *the spectator's absorptive pull into the film*, and the film's seeking of the spectator, the film's attempt to 'present' itself to the spectator, in other words, its *theatricality*.²²

²² See the similar dialectic Fried constructs for Courbet's painting in *Courbet's Realism*, pp. 138–9.

²³ See Tom Gunning, "Primitive" cinema: a frame-up? Or the trick's on us', in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), pp. 95–103; Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Early cinema has typically been accorded a theatrical resonance. There was for many years a belief that early cinema was in fact a *pre-cinema*, a 'primitive' cinema, whose links were closer to the theatre than to the cinema as it is known today. Recent histories of cinema have completely dispelled this view.²³ In Anglo-US film studies, the writings of Charles Musser, Tom Gunning, Richard Abel and others have put paid to the idea that the early cinema was in any way primitive, or that it was merely a kind of filmed theatre. I have no intention of revisiting

such arguments, for what I wish to argue here is not that a certain type or mode of cinema is in any way attached to the theatre but that these early films are *theatrical* in the sense in which Fried has used that term.

Significantly, Gunning mentions Fried in one of his articles on the 'cinema of attractions'.

The cinema of attractions stands at the antipode to the experience Michael Fried, in his discussion of eighteenth-century painting, calls absorption. For Fried, the painting of Greuze and others created a new relation to the viewer through a self-contained hermetic world which makes no acknowledgement of the beholder's presence. Early cinema totally ignores this construction of the beholder. These early films explicitly acknowledge their spectator, seeming to reach outwards and confront. Contemplative absorption is impossible here.²⁴

²⁴ Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', *Art & Text* (Spring 1989), p. 38.

²⁵ Tom Gunning, 'The cinema of attractions: early film, its spectator and the avant-garde', in Elsaesser and Barker (eds), *Early Cinema*, p. 59.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

For Gunning, then, Fried's distinction between absorption and theatricality has been helpful for theorizing film. In another article he writes that in early cinema, 'theatrical display dominates over narrative absorption'.²⁵ It is also important for his theorization of early cinema that this cinema is exhibitionist rather than voyeuristic: 'Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema', he writes, early cinema is 'an exhibitionist cinema'.²⁶ Gunning's position is one that therefore defines itself by virtue of its opposition to absorption and the voyeurism associated with narrative cinema, while in the early cinema he finds a form that he occasionally designates as 'theatrical display', though this is a theatricality that does not have anything to do with the theatre.²⁷ Rather, Gunning genuinely wishes to equate his position with Fried's notion of theatricality.

Perhaps the most difficult sections of 'Art and objecthood' are those in which Fried tries to articulate the bodily relation the viewer has to a theatrical artwork: the theatrical mode is one that invokes a play between the beholder's body and the art object (this is what gives such objects their 'objecthood'); the situation confers upon the beholder a sense of physical participation. This kind of physical spectatorial activity is similar to that which Gunning regards as part of the experience of the early cinema. As he contends, the spectatorial address of early cinema is one that refutes the notion, once common in film studies, that the spectator is a *passive* receiver of images.²⁸ By contrast, the cinema of attractions places an emphasis on 'direct stimulation',²⁹ it 'addresses the audience directly, sometimes... exaggerating this confrontation in an experience of assault'.³⁰ Furthermore, Gunning also contends that 'the images of the cinema of attractions rush forward to meet their viewers'.³¹ Gunning does not automatically declare that the spectator of early cinema is *active*, as opposed to the (supposedly) purely passive spectator of classical cinema, but there is certainly a

²⁸ See Gunning's comments in 'An aesthetic of astonishment', p. 32.

²⁹ Gunning, 'The cinema of attractions', p. 59.

³⁰ Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment', p. 36.

³¹ Ibid.

sense in which the situation invoked by early films involves a much more physical experience. Thus early cinema is theatrical in the sense Fried gives to that term.

More intriguing, however, is Fried's assertion that, as a result of the play between the theatrical artwork and the spectator's body, the spectator is *distanced* from the object. This seems a strange point to make, for much of the *raison d'être* of theatrical artworks (minimalism, conceptual art) was that they were designed to *include* the beholder, to make the boundary between viewer and artwork disappear, and thereby to collapse the distinction between subject and object. Nevertheless, it is Fried's contention that, quite contrary to this aim of dissolving the distance between object-work and subject-spectator, the awareness that the spectator is in some sense *involved* with the object – that is, that the spectator is *part of the situation that constitutes the art object* – specifically marks or situates the spectator *as a subject*. Fried argues that 'The object, not the beholder, must remain the center of focus of the situation, but the situation itself *belongs to* the beholder – it is *his* situation'.³² Fried goes further than this to emphasize the importance of his point. He argues that theatrical artworks often *demand the complicity of the beholder*; to quote Fried directly, such works demand 'the special complicity that the work extorts from the beholder'.³³

This argument is nothing if not complex, but the sense that Fried is trying to convey is that a viewer is only impressed by a theatrical artwork *because the viewer is there with it*. The artwork's assurance that 'I am there in front of it' becomes the most important factor of the artwork itself, and it becomes important because *I am the one who is making the artwork possible*; my presence in front of the artwork is what is enabling it to exist and, *ipso facto*, it is this that makes the artwork important. That is to say, it is not the artwork itself that is important, rather the artwork's addressing of me as attendant in its presence is essential. In short, the artwork is effective and enjoyable because it makes me feel important. It assures me of the importance of my own subjectivity, and correlatively I feel the importance of the artwork's 'objecthood'.

This kind of subjective complicity that is implied by the artwork's 'objecthood' may be seen in terms of one of early cinema's most salient features: the use of direct address, or 'the recurring look at the camera by the actors'.³⁴ For Gunning, the look at the camera is, among other things, a way of 'establishing contact with the audience'. He continues: 'From comedians smirking at the camera, to the constant bowing and gesturing of the conjurors in magic films, this is a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator'.³⁵ Perhaps some more sense can be made of this point if the theatrical artwork, and early cinema along with it, are thought of as being works that, above all else, say to their audience, 'Look at me!'.³⁶ (Indeed, Gunning at one point describes an attraction as something that declares 'Here it

³² Fried, 'Art and objecthood', p. 154.

³³ Ibid., p. 155.

³⁴ Gunning, 'The cinema of attractions', p. 57.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ This was the worst claim that could be made when the aim of painting was one of absorption; see the criticism of Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* by the contemporary critic Chaumelin in Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, p. 299.

³⁷ Tom Gunning, "'Now you see it, now you don't': the temporality of the cinema of attractions', in Richard Abel (ed.), *Silent Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 76.

³⁸ See, for example, Gunning's arguments in *ibid.*, pp. 75ff.

³⁹ Gunning, 'The cinema of attractions', p. 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ See Constance Balides, 'Scenarios of exposure in the practice of everyday life: women in the cinema of attractions', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 1 (1993). Cf. Judith Mayne, 'Primitive' narration', in *Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁴² Gunning, 'Now you see it', p. 75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

⁴⁴ Gunning refers to the 'enigma' that is central to the theorization of narrative (as theorized by the Russian Formalists, for example), but which is not at all evident in the cinema of attractions: 'Attractions' fundamental hold on spectators depends on arousing and satisfying visual curiosity through a direct and acknowledged act of display, rather than following a narrative enigma within a diegetic site into which the spectators peer invisibly' (Gunning, 'Now you see it', p. 75). Mayne, in *The Woman at the Keyhole* also questions Gunning's all-too-simple theorization of the voyeurism-exhibitionism pair (pp. 164ff).

Gunning appears at times to be almost apologetic about the nature of attractions, as when he refers to the early 'facial expression' films: 'As products of popular culture, these films are deeply complicit in the stereotypes of patriarchal, racist, and economically exploitative ideologies, and the marks of these systems are clearly legible in their imagery'. Tom Gunning, 'In your face: physiognomy, photography, and the gnostic mission of early film', *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 4, no.1 (1997), p. 25.

is! Look at it'.³⁷ In terms that have been often used in film theory, such images would be classified as *exhibitionist*, a point which Gunning would in no way query for the case of early cinema.³⁸ When the viewer accedes to the object's demand to be looked at, then the viewer is complying with its demand. It could even be claimed that this demand is in the order of a kind of contractual exchange in which the elements of the exchange are agreed upon. What this suggests is that, far from offering a dual relation to the work, the relation to theatrical artwork is, at bottom, *one-dimensional*.

This claim can be clarified with recourse to the idea of exhibitionism in the cinema (at least so far as Gunning theorizes it). Gunning refers to the film *The Bride Retires* (1902) in order to support his claim that it 'reveals a fundamental conflict between [the] exhibitionistic tendency of early film and the creation of a fictional diegesis'.³⁹ He describes the events of the film: 'A woman undresses for bed while her new husband peers at her from behind a screen. However, it is to the camera and the audience that the bride addresses her erotic striptease, winking at us as she faces us, smiling in erotic display'.⁴⁰ The gambit of such films (frequent in early cinema)⁴¹ is that they rely on the complicity of the audience for the exhibitionist display to be successful; a knowing wink at the audience ensures that the audience knows that the character knows she is being looked at. In short, the audience knows the film's activity is exhibitionist.

However, the complicity between the film and the audience is also a complicity between *exhibitionist* and *voyeur* – if Gunning characterizes the later narrative cinema as voyeuristic while the early cinema is exhibitionist, then he is telling only half the story. Early cinema can indeed be described as exhibitionist, but only insofar as *its form of exhibitionism is one that goes hand-in-hand with voyeurism*. The form of attractions is one in which the look of the spectator is responded to in a mode of complicity and agreement by the *to-be-looked-at-ness* of the attraction: 'The attraction directly addresses the spectator, acknowledging the viewer's presence and seeking to quickly satisfy a curiosity'.⁴² Gunning admits that the films of the classical cinema offer 'a world that allows itself to be seen but that also refuses to acknowledge its complicity with a spectator'.⁴³ So films of the classical cinema may be considered as ones that are *not* necessarily complicit with their audience, or at least they are films whose effects do not demand complicity from the audience. On the other hand, the cinema of attractions openly affirms its complicity with the spectator; the early cinema openly acknowledges the voyeuristic curiosity of the spectator and responds to this voyeurism with a compliant exhibitionism. In the cinema of attractions, voyeurism goes hand-in-hand with exhibitionism. This complicity between the exhibition and the voyeur renders the space of representation unproblematic, free from enigma and free from difficulty.⁴⁴

This complementarity is not at all far from the kinds of complicity

45 Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', especially section CII.

invoked by the female displays of classical cinema, according to Mulvey's thesis, though Mulvey attempts to make a distinction between voyeurism and 'fetishistic scopophilia'.⁴⁵ Christian Metz, on the other hand, in 'The imaginary signifier', does make an important allusion to forms of exhibitionism that are complicit with voyeurism, and of the way that such forms can be differentiated from those of the classical cinema:

the [classical narrative] cinema differs profoundly from the theatre as also from more intimate voyeuristic activities with a specifically erotic aim (there are intermediate genres, moreover: certain cabaret acts, strip-tease, etc.): cases where voyeurism remains linked to exhibitionism, where the two faces, active and passive, of the component drive are by no means dissociated; where the object seen is present and hence presumably complicit.⁴⁶

46 Metz, 'The imaginary signifier', pp. 61–2.

Metz's central claim here is crucial, and it raises a point that must be heeded with regard to early cinema: 'cases where voyeurism remains linked to exhibitionism'. Early cinema, with its 'theatrical display' and its direct audience address is a type of cinema where voyeurism and exhibitionism are complementary, that is, early cinema is predicated on 'cases where voyeurism remains linked to exhibitionism'. Contrary to Gunning's claims, early cinema is not merely exhibitionist and cannot therefore be simply opposed to a classical cinema that is (supposedly, straightforwardly) voyeuristic. Rather, early cinema is *both* exhibitionist and voyeuristic. The demand for voyeurism is explicitly acknowledged and addressed: that is why it is *one-dimensional*; the exhibitionist complies with the voyeurist and vice-versa.

In addition to the comments referred to above, Metz adds that the kinds of display to which he is referring have the result of 'the illusion of the fullness of an object relation'.⁴⁷ With the aid of psychoanalytic theory, Metz explains the way in which the complicity between voyeurism and exhibitionism invokes a situation that is experienced as 'complete' or 'full'; that is, it is a situation in which subject (viewer) and object (artwork) compose a relatively complete harmony. Is this not precisely what Fried is getting at in his critique of theatricality: that it makes the viewer feel important (whole, full, complete); that it makes the beholder feel like a subject who is being affirmed by the objecthood being exhibited, and exhibited especially for the edification of this subjected subject? In this sense, Metz makes a claim that is very similar to the claim Fried makes for theatricality. The situation Metz describes is a situation in which the object–artwork acknowledges – or, more accurately, *beckons* – the subject–spectator, and in which a relation of complicity and distancedness between subject and object (the artwork's objecthood) is experienced as being in some way special (a shock, a thrill, an attraction).

There is an important difference between this complicit voyeurism and the voyeurism of the classical narrative cinema.⁴⁸ In the latter, the

48 Metz details these differences in *ibid.* pp. 62–3.

spectator must *go out into* the work, the spectator must go outside of him/herself in order to enter into the work, to explore and encounter what takes place there. On the other hand, the early cinema is predicated on an anticipated bargain that is struck between exhibitor and audience. In a sense, one may always be surprised by what one sees, but in the context of early cinema one is never surprised that one is surprised, nor shocked that one is shocked: one always anticipates the shock to come.

So far this article has tried to determine two types of cinema in relation to Michael Fried's theses on absorption and theatricality. The first type is characteristically identified as the 'classical narrative cinema'. Partly following Fried, I have called this type of cinema *non-theatrical*, and have argued that it involves the spectator in a dual relation to that which is being viewed.⁴⁹ This dual relation exists as a tension between the absorption of the spectator into the world of the film, and the simultaneous impossibility of this absorption: that is, the fact that the film also impresses itself upon the spectator as a material artefact. The second type of cinema, identified with the notion of the 'cinema of attractions', is one that I have called *theatrical* (again using Fried as a guide). This type of cinema is characterized by the spectator's *one-dimensional* relation to the film, one in which the film's full presentation (and presentness) of itself to the spectator is accepted and complied with by the spectator. It is theatrical because, following the quite complex argument of Fried, its most important aspect is the complicity it elicits from the spectator which, in a very strong way, affirms the spectator's subjectivity (as subject, as *subjected*).

A third type of cinema (and there are infinite types) is *anti-theatrical*. For all intents and purposes, the anti-theatrical cinema is the *modern cinema*. The modern cinema is often associated with various postwar cinemas of the new wave (in France, Britain and Latin America, for example), though it has important antecedents in certain film movements of the 1920s and 1930s. John Orr has defined this range of modern cinemas in his *Cinema and Modernity* and the boundaries he lays out may be taken as a guide.⁵⁰

What are the distinctive features of the modern cinema? Orr outlines some aspects: reflexivity, a capacity for irony, pastiche, self-reflection, of 'putting everything in quotation marks'.⁵¹ In more specific terms, the modern cinema is one that, in Europe at least, sees itself to a certain extent as an oppositional cinema, one opposed to the perceived hegemony of the classical narrative cinema, that hegemony that Noël Burch dubbed the 'Institutional Mode of Representation'.⁵² This oppositionality brought forth new modes of representation (or the revival of some older methods), principally involving new experiments

⁴⁹ It should be noted that my thesis here is not in any way groundbreaking – see, for example, Richard Maltby and Ian Craven, *Hollywood Cinema: an Introduction* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (London: IB Tauris, 2000).

⁵⁰ John Orr, *Cinema and Modernity* (London: Polity, 1993). Cf. John Orr, *Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

⁵¹ Orr, *Cinema and Modernity*, p. 2.

⁵² Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. H.R. Lane (New York, NY: Praeger, 1973). Also see David Bordwell's stimulating 'The return of modernism: Noël Burch and the oppositional paradigm', in *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 83–157.

in montage and new modes of storytelling. Many lists and suggestions could be put forward in an attempt to describe just what the modern cinema *is*. However, I will look to Fried once again for guidance.

Fried established a unique approach to what he perceived were the most important aspects of the *modernity* of modern art. '[M]odernist painting', he wrote, 'in its constantly renewed effort to discover what it must be, is forever driven "outside" itself, compelled to place in jeopardy its very identity by engaging with what it is not'.⁵³ Edouard Manet grappled with this problem of forcing painting beyond itself by way of a clear engagement with significant artworks of the past. But Manet also ensured that his gestures towards the art of the past would always disconcertingly rub up against the most pressing issues of painting in the present (that is, France in the 1860s and beyond). Therefore, while the contents of his paintings clearly and deliberately drew on the great art of the past – as *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* draws on Raphael, for example⁵⁴ – the *form* that such paintings took was still responding to the issue which had dominated discussions of French painting for more than a century. That issue was *absorption*.

For his part, Manet found it utterly impossible to aim for the absorptive ideal, the ideal for which his contemporaries were still striving and which most critics were still praising. In simple terms, Manet accepted the brute fact that paintings were made to be beheld, that they were made to be looked at. However, he also realized, argues Fried, 'that it was therefore necessary to establish the beholder's presence *abstractly* ... in order that the worst consequences of theatricality be averted. Such a reading identifies Manet's enterprise as simultaneously antitheatrical and theatrical'.⁵⁵

Manet's art was therefore one which put both theatricality and absorption into question, a situation that Fried describes as a 'double bind'. Manet wanted his works to be neither theatrical nor absorptive. Rather, he wanted these terms to 'argue' upon the canvas, which for Fried means that 'the viewer is faced by an ontological double bind'.⁵⁶ Manet's paintings address the viewer directly – they *present* themselves to the viewer; they make themselves present to the viewer as *paintings* – but they also simultaneously make clear the fact that they are not present to the viewer, that is, that they are absent.⁵⁷ This is what Fried means when he writes that Manet's paintings posit a viewer 'abstractly': they posit a viewer who is split, questioning, troubled – a viewer who is not quite sure where she/he is.

This disorientation, this need to make oneself an 'abstract beholder' in front of a painting, is clearly evident in Manet's magnificent *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882). All of the intricacies and complexities of the questioning of theatricality and absorption, or, perhaps more accurately, all of the difficulty of discerning the difference between theatricality and absorption, are evident in this painting:

⁵³ Michael Fried, 'How modernism works: a response to T.J. Clark', in F. Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After: the Critical Debate*, second edition (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 93.

⁵⁴ See Michael Fried's 'Manet's sources, 1859–1869', in *Manet's Modernism*. The article was originally published in 1969.

⁵⁵ Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, p. 265, my emphasis. Fried is actually quoting himself from *Courbet's Realism*, pp. 200–1.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 344.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*



Edouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (oil on canvas, 1882). Picture courtesy: The Samuel Courtauld Trust, Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London.

the top-hatted customer in the mirror both 'is' and 'is not' standing before the barmaid: he 'is' if we regard the reflection as veridical, which is to say if we imagine placing ourselves sufficiently off to the right for the reflection to make geometrical sense; he 'is not' if we stand in the beholder's traditional position directly in front of the painting, in which case it is we who either 'are' the customer in the mirror or have somehow usurped his place, even if the reflection fails to record the fact. But then our very access to the reflection of the customer in the mirror will have become problematic to say the least.⁵⁸

58 Ibid., p. 345.

Fried charts the very 'impossibility' of the *Bar*: the viewer of the painting is in a sense compelled to try to enter into the story of the canvas (it is enough to say, as one commentator has, that 'the *Bar* looks right before it looks wrong')⁵⁹ while forever being kept at bay, not the least by the gaze of the barmaid, but also by the impenetrable incongruity of the space in which the scene is constructed, to say nothing also of the painting's temporal dimension.⁶⁰ The beholder is 'summoned' by the painting,⁶¹ which is to say that the painting is one that appears at first glance to hold a certain promise of absorption, while simultaneously confronting its viewers with a mute impenetrability in a way that foregrounds its very constructedness, its 'paintedness' – in other words, its theatricality. *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* effectively combines absorption and theatricality without necessarily giving precedence to either. Conclusively for Fried, 'the *Bar* may thus be seen as making explicit the double relation to the beholder I have ascribed to Manet's paintings'.⁶²

The beholder of the *Bar* is an abstract one for the simple reason that this beholder must occupy (at least) two positions at once – as the one

59 Kermit Champa, 'Le chef d'œuvre (bien connu)', in B. Collins (ed.), *Twelve Views of Manet's 'Bar'* (New Jersey, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), quoted in Thierry de Duve, 'How Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is constructed', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 25 (Autumn, 1998), p. 143.

60 The doubled temporality of Manet's canvases forms an important line of enquiry for Fried in *Manet's Modernism*. Unfortunately I have not the space to deal with these arguments and their very profound relation to thinking about the cinema.

61 Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, p. 344.

62 Ibid., p. 345.

who greets the barmaid or the one who takes the place of the top-hatted man – neither of which can be said to be conclusively absorptive or theatrical. This splitting or doubling necessitates an abstraction: the viewer cannot simply hold to one position but must continually hypothesize and re-hypothesize her/his relation to the canvas: a to-ing and fro-ing that is never done with, and within which hovers a lingering doubt. To add to this, of course, the barmaid herself adopts a potentially absorptive pose, as though she is lost in thought, or thinking about something. In short, she is not acknowledging her to-be-looked-at-ness. And yet Manet has painted her in such a way as to make this potentially absorptive mode utterly ambiguous: the barmaid is just as much addressing the viewer as she is lost in thought; which is to say her pose seems to be as much theatrical as it might be absorptive. All in all, the complexities and ambiguities of this painting boldly affirm its modernism.⁶³

What is most important for the artwork of Manet, as far as it relates to a notion of modernness which also exists in the modern cinema, is the explicitness of this dialectical tension between absorption and theatricality. For Manet's modernism there is a double approach, an approach that is absorptive and theatrical at the same time, that is both theatrical and antitheatrical, absorptive and non-absorptive. This dialectical tension is also precisely the characteristic of a cinema that is modern. The way in which this dialectical tension is expounded by modern cinema is what distinguishes it from both early cinema and classical cinema.

If classical cinema necessitates a dual mode of spectatorship, then this dual mode is quite different from the 'double bind' of spectatorship in modern cinema. Classical cinema encourages the spectator to *go out into* the film, to almost become part of its diegetic world (even if only imaginarily).⁶⁴ This is, as suggested earlier, the kind of fusion between beholder and painting that drove Courbet's work. However, for the classical cinema (as much as for Courbet's paintings), as much as the spectator might wish to be fused with the work, the spectator simultaneously knows that what she/he is watching is 'only a film' – such is the dual nature of spectatorship in the classical cinema. Nevertheless, the guiding thread of this mode of spectatorship that is typical of the classical cinema is a thread that aims for *absorption*. And it is this tendency for absorption that definitively differentiates the classical cinema from the modern cinema, for the modern cinema does not have absorption as its primary aim. This does not mean that the modern cinema straightforwardly refutes absorption (in the way that Gunning claims for early cinema). Rather, it places absorption in question, and provides a tendency wherein absorption and theatricality become indiscernible, caught as they are in a double bind.

Pierrot le fou – to return to the point from which this essay began – provides many moments which foreground this question of the relation between theatricality and absorption. It is therefore an example of a

⁶³ I am simplifying here for the sake of keeping my argument as clear as is possible. I wholeheartedly agree with de Duve's recent analysis of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* in which he convincingly disputes the notion that the spectator must occupy two spaces. Rather, de Duve demonstrates that the painting is constructed according to a strict following of Albertian perspective, and that rather than being a spatial doubling, there is in fact a temporal doubling. The beholder of the *Bar* is therefore not doubled in spatial or bodily terms, but rather in mental or psychological and temporal terms. See de Duve, 'How Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is constructed'.

⁶⁴ On these issues see my 'Cinema's double'.

modern film. Metz, writing shortly after the film's release, focused on a scene that highlights this problematic in an exceptional way, a scene which defied the categories that he had previously constructed as part of the *Grand Syntagmatique*. Metz describes the scene as

the moment when the two protagonists hurriedly leave the white-walled Paris apartment by sliding down a drainpipe, and flee in a red 404 Peugeot along the banks of the Seine. This 'sequence,' which is in fact not a sequence, freely alternates shots taken from the sidewalk in front of the building ... with other images that, from the diegetic point of view, occur several minutes later in another location. ... The passage thus yields several unusual repetitions: From the banks of the river we go back to the drainpipe; the entrance of the car at the foot of the building is itself shown two or three times with slight variations in the position and in the movements of the characters.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Christian Metz, 'The modern cinema and narrativity', in *Film Language: a Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 218.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Similar formulations have been made in two brilliant articles by Joan Copjec: 'The orthopsychic subject: film theory and the reception of Lacan', in *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1994), and 'The strut of vision: seeing's corporeal support', in C.B. Gill (ed.), *Time and the Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 35–47.

The scene maps out the contours of what might be called an abstract beholder – and Metz's comments on the scene do it credit. The scene necessitates a viewer who can imagine herself/himself within the diegesis, and thus following the contours of sliding down the drainpipe and dashing away in a car – that is, a spectator engaged in the mode of *absorption* – while simultaneously monitoring or scrutinizing this potential absorption. The spectator must put together the potential scenario abstractly (*how did this escape occur?*), while at the same time being absorbed in the very action or activity of the escape. The spectator is always wholly aware of the film's theatrical strategies – its montages, its modes of fabrication (its 'fablic nature', writes Metz)⁶⁶ – but is also aware of the possibility of being fully absorbed in the action – that is, the spectator is fully aware of being able to construct ('inside her/his head', as Metz puts it) 'the event that really did occur (and which we will never know').⁶⁷

Viewers of this scene are voyeurs, but *abstract* ones.⁶⁸ Competing with any sense of voyeurism, of being caught up in watching the events, is a sensation of the film's quality as an exhibit, its *exhibitionism*. And these qualities – the voyeurism and the exhibitionism of the scene – *occur at one and the same time*. But the way that these two tendencies occur simultaneously is utterly different from the way they occur together in the cinema of attractions. There, in early cinema, voyeurism is complicit with exhibitionism: they function in harmony with each other, where the thrill of the spectacle is the thrill of things being in agreement, of forming a complicity. This complementarity is the opposite of the disjunctive use of the voyeurism–exhibitionism couple in modern cinema. In modern cinema, the exhibitionist mode serves actively to disrupt the voyeuristic mode so that the spectator's will-to-look is opened out into a form of questioning; a double form or double bind that places in question the spectator's own voyeuristic ambitions and the film's exhibitionist tendencies.

Indeed, this point is driven home by Metz in his further comments on the scene already described from *Pierrot le fou* and the kind of audience engagement produced therein. The scene plays itself out in such a way as never to 'arrive', as it were, except as a *possibility* or as a '*potential sequence*'. It contains within its unfolding, 'several possibilities at the same time'.⁶⁹ Hence the necessity of there being an abstract beholder: a beholder who constructs the theoretical possibilities of the unfolding of the scene in time and space. And perhaps this is also what is essential to the modernness of the modern cinema as much as for modern painting: the tendency of a work (a film, a painting) to go outside itself in order to stretch the possibilities of what it can be, and furthermore, to stretch the capacities of the spectator's possibilities of what (or where, when, how) she/he can be.

Arguably, it is this possibility of questioning that most affirms the modern cinema's *anti-theatricality*. Granted, the claim that the modern cinema is *wholly* anti-theatrical is a claim that cannot be sustained – at bottom, it is both theatrical and anti-theatrical. However, insofar as the forms of the modern cinema utterly refute any tendency towards the one-dimensionality of theatricality in favour of the complexity of a doubled approach – a double bind, as Fried argues, an approach that puts in question both the possibility of absorption and the possibility of theatricality – it is most accurate to speak of the modern cinema in terms of an anti-theatricality.

The preceding pages have investigated three types of cinema: non-theatrical, theatrical and anti-theatrical. At a more fundamental level, a more telling distinction has been made between the types of cinema that offer the viewer a dual relation to the filmic experience, experiences which are at base multidimensional, and a type of cinema that is characteristically one-dimensional. The classical fiction cinema and the modern cinema – those 'types' of cinema allied with non-theatricality and anti-theatricality respectively (though, it must be admitted that these categories are rather imprecise) – are dual or doubled types of cinema, and they also, perhaps, offer the possibility of more relations, of more levels of engagement. The theatrical cinema, on the other hand, which finds its greatest exemplar as the early cinema, finds itself on a singular circuit of one-dimensionality. There, the gaze of the film is answered by the spectator and the gaze of the spectator is answered by the film: a frictionless machine of fullness.

⁶⁹ Metz, 'The modern cinema', p. 219.

Breaking Boundaries in Television Historiography: Historical Research and the Television Archive, University of Reading, 9 January 2004

ALEXANDER DHOEST

Surveying the field, John Corner has noted a strengthened interest in television history,¹ and the one-day AHRB-funded symposium *Breaking Boundaries in Television Historiography* both testified to this trend and highlighted some of its key issues. The symposium was organized by Helen Wheatley (University of Reading) at the Centre for Television Drama Studies, as part of the AHRB project 'Cultures of British Television Drama, 1960–82'. Nevertheless, the symposium dealt with both fiction and nonfiction, theoretically including all television of the past. The staggering breadth of its object is one of the problems facing television historiography, and will be developed below. However, the symposium did show significant patterns, both related to its specific aims and to broader tendencies within the field.

To start, the emphasis was on British television, which is probably studied more extensively than any other television system in the world. This implies a rich literature on which to draw but also the danger of myopic vision, possibly losing sight of the determining nature of cultural context. The field could definitely profit from more international and comparative research, clarifying the specificity of British broadcasting. In this respect, the contemporary Eurofiction research sets an example that could be spread to other genres, periods and regions.²

A second theme was related to the symposium's focus on research methodologies and sources, in particular on archives. Many papers explicitly dealt with key methodological questions in the area, such as how to go about research on television history, which sources to use, and how to access them. This granted the otherwise diverse papers a common ground, the totality of the presentations providing a good

¹ John Corner, 'Finding data, reading patterns, telling stories: issues in the historiography of television', *Media, Culture & Society*, no. 25 (2003), pp. 273–90.

² The Eurofiction Project. URL: <http://www.abc.coe.int/oea-pub/eurofic/project.html> [accessed 11/02/2004].

overview of the methods used in the field. Particularly interesting in this respect was the presence of archivists, one of the aims of the symposium being to promote links between academic researchers and institutions making research materials available.

The archivists took central stage in the first plenary session, representing various institutions curating television: the BBC Written Archives, the British Film Institute (BFI) and the British Universities Film & Video Council (BUFVC). The BFI presented *screenonline*, providing video extracts, still images, analyses and filmographic information on British film and television (www.screenonline.org.uk). The BUFVC is also expanding its online services, including references and access to audiovisual material (www.bufvc.ac.uk). The composition of this panel accentuated important differences in archival sources, most evidently in their focus on written or audiovisual material, both with particular histories and problems of storage and retrieval. For a long time, written materials were easier to access and analyze than the enormous and extremely volatile output of television programmes. However, the introduction of the VCR and more recently of online databases and digital video has rendered audiovisual material increasingly accessible, the analysis of written material becoming relatively more cumbersome. This has important implications for current and future research, which may increasingly use audiovisual rather than written material. Depending on the efforts put in the digitalization of older programmes, it may also imply that contemporary television becomes easier to track while older television becomes ever harder to study. It remains to be seen how this will affect television historiography, but one probable effect is the increased study of recent television history.

Another difference this panel brought to the fore is related to the archives' respective 'target audiences'. While the BUFVC and BFI archives are explicitly aimed at researchers, the BBC Written Archives are primarily intended for use by the broadcasters themselves. Head of BBC Written Archives Jacqueline Kavanagh usefully pointed out the implications this has in terms of organization and access. The aim of this archive is primarily to keep all documents generated by the institution, grouped by department. This implies that the documents are not ordered to suit historical research, for instance by grouping all the material in relation to a single programme, genre or person. Researchers using this archive therefore have to acquaint themselves with the system and follow its logic, taking on board its limitations (some materials are not kept, some are inaccessible to outsiders). However, the storage of materials according to their organizational origins also offers advantages, in particular a richness of contextual information.

The presence of archivists at a primarily academic event was valuable in providing views from both sides of the theory-practice divide. The growing awareness of the need to make materials

accessible is reassuring, while the limitations are sobering: the gargantuan task and cost of archiving an ever expanding television output coupled with its low priority for commercial broadcasters. While the practitioners' accounts did not lead to a clash of cultures, they did put the common complaints of television history researchers concerning limited resources and accessibility into perspective.

Indeed, the availability and access of sources is one of the core issues in television historiography, which became apparent in the remainder of the papers. As suggested above, traditionally the majority of sources were written: archive materials, policy and administrative documents, annual reports, correspondence and press coverage. Due to processes of selection, not all written sources were kept, and because of their manner of organization some sources are hard to track, while others are not accessible to researchers for reasons of confidentiality. Moreover, most of this material was generated by the broadcasting institutions themselves, thus mostly providing 'official' history 'from above'. Increasingly, oral history interviews are used as a corrective, to write history 'from below'. This tendency fits within a wider trend in television historiography, noted by Christopher Anderson and Michael Curtin: the shift from top-down to bottom-up history, focusing on daily practices and uses.³ As opposed to the long-standing efforts to preserve written documents, the comparatively low availability and accessibility of audiovisual material partly explains the lack of concrete historical programme analysis. In striking contrast with the centrality of the text in historical film studies, textual analysis is relatively underdeveloped in television historiography. As emphasized by John Corner (University of Liverpool), this also has important pedagogic consequences: how to teach television history virtually without visual materials?

The paucity of material is a recurrent theme in accounts of television history, but one that needs to be put into perspective. Supporting the above call for awareness of the cultural context of research, the particular complaints of British researchers may sound like a luxury when one takes into account the sorry state (or even absence) of broadcasting archives in other nations. The Spanish case, presented by Carmen Ciller and Juan Carlos Ibáñez (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), is illustrative. Due to strong state control over broadcasting, the lack of (accessible) broadcasting archives in Spain makes historical research all but impossible. While British archives may have their limitations, comparatively they offer a wealth of material.

The limitations on the level of research sources have important methodological implications for television historiography. Contrary to popular belief television is a complex object of research, with a diversity of aspects to be taken into account. Thus, Corner distinguishes between the television as institution, as making (professional practice), as representation and form (aesthetics), as sociocultural phenomenon and as technology.⁴ However, not all of these fields are equally developed in historical research, which is partly related to the

³ Christopher Anderson and Michael Curtin, 'Writing cultural history: the challenge of radio and television', in N. Brügger and S. Kolstrup (eds), *Media history: Theories, Methods, Analysis* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002), pp. 15–32.

⁴ Corner, 'Finding data', p. 275.

5 Charlotte Brunsdon, 'What is the "television" of television studies?', in Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 95–113.

6 Geraghty and Lusted (eds), *The Television Studies Book*.

availability of sources. Overall, the literature is most developed in relation to television institutions and policies, clearly prioritizing public broadcasting – a tendency that can partly be explained by the availability of written sources on the BBC. As suggested above, the dearth of historical textual analysis of television is related to the limited accessibility of old television programmes. There is an important body of research on contemporary genres such as soaps and sitcoms, but, as Charlotte Brunsdon observes, these tend to focus on ideologies rather than aesthetics.⁵ Finally, while reception is a staple of contemporary television research (both quantitative effect research and qualitative 'audience ethnography'), there is hardly any historical analysis of reception.

Generally, as remarked by Tim O'Sullivan (De Montfort University), television historiography has tended to focus on supply rather than demand. Moreover, historical literature so far has shown more interest in television structures than in television cultures. The symposium illustrated a gradual shift in the field, showing a relatively equal spread of work on television production, texts and reception. There is also an important trend in television studies to combine analyses of texts, institutions and viewing contexts.⁶ This is witnessed both by the 'Cultures of Television Drama' project, and by Wendy Phillips's (University of Westminster) plea for historical research integrating these aspects.

Another tendency illustrated by the symposium is the expansion of research on the previously underdeveloped field of historical audience response, and more broadly on the cultural history of television. For instance, both Henrik Ornebring (University of Leicester) and O'Sullivan presented research on viewing cultures and the place of television in everyday life. Janet Thumim (University of Bristol) commented more broadly on the role of television in social change, reflecting on the pitfalls to be negotiated in reading historical material using contemporary categories and assumptions. She thus touched upon a general problem in historiography: knowledge of the past being restricted to reconstruction and interpretation of discourses from the present. As noted by O'Sullivan, television historiographers have to take care not to repeat uncritically the critical orthodoxy, in particular by repeating television's own representations of its history. A related danger is that of nostalgic accounts of former television programming and viewing.

Ultimately, the issue of sources and methods in television history relates to broader concerns in contemporary historiography. Insights into the constructed and discursive nature of history lead to an increased awareness of the historical and cultural context of historical narratives. In such an understanding of history the use of particular methods and sources is strategic, as it determines the possible conclusions. Thus, the traditional interest in institutions and policies within television historiography may partly be the result of the

⁷ Anderson and Curtin, 'Writing cultural history', p. 17.

availability of sources, but it does betray a particular view of broadcasting, stressing institutional power and downplaying viewer agency. The 'cultural turn' in television history noted by Anderson and Curtin reacts to this view by emphasizing personal, lived experiences of television in everyday life, making for a very different understanding of the past.⁷ In view of these broader implications, the reflection on methods is a useful exercise, which supports the need for focused events such as the *Breaking Boundaries* symposium.

Xavier Mendik and Steven J. Schneider (eds), *Underground USA: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon* (AlterImage Series). New York, NY and London: Wallflower Press, 2002, 235 pp.

Tony Williams, *The Cinema of George A. Romero: Knight of the Living Dead* (Directors' Cuts Series). New York, NY and London: Wallflower Press, 2003, 214 pp.

Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Rebol, Julian Stringer and Andy Willis (eds), *Defining Cult Movies: the Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Inside Popular Film Series). New York, NY and Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2003, 244 pp.

JUSTIN SMITH

The three books under review here reflect the eclectic range of hitherto marginalized material now categorized, embraced and celebrated under the various critical banners of cult, underground, avant garde and exploitation. In many instances academic intervention both illuminates and sanctions erstwhile neglected or debased cinemas, expanding our appreciation of the diverse riches in marginal tastes. But these works also provide revealing commentary on the institutional micropractices of independent filmmaking, and their complex relations with notions of the 'mainstream'. In addition, many writers in this field are sensitive to the academic's political position with regard to critical method and fan reception, in territory which, if not uncharted, remains largely undefined in 'orthodox' disciplinary models.

Issues of definition are perhaps the most perplexing problem given the sheer diversity of work under consideration here. While fair attention is given to a host of celebrated independent directors – John Waters, Abel Ferrara, Radley Metzger, Melvin Van Peebles, Doris Wishman (twice), Dario Argento, Lloyd Kaufman, Larry Cohen, et al. – and George A. Romero is warranted a volume all of his own, the

avant-garde and experimental (Andy Warhol, Curtis Harrington, Bruce Connor, Harry Smith and Harmony Korine) sometimes sit uneasily in the critical company of outright exploitation and excess (snuff, splatter, grindhouse, gross-out and gore), and fringe-genre (horror, sci-fi, martial arts and the biker film), notwithstanding their shared sites of exhibition in pre-video days.

While attempts at categorization are never allowed to detract from thorough examination of individual artists, the career paths of many cross the liminal boundaries between mainstream production and independent work. In Xavier Mendik and Steven Schneider's edited volume *Underground USA: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, Stephen R. Bissette demonstrates how, for example, Curtis Harrington used 'the horror genre as a generic bridge to mainstream film-making' (p. 41), while Annalee Newitz considers the 1999 multiplex successes of *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes) and *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez) as 'contemporary speculations about the social importance of making non-mainstream movies' (p. 162). In similar vein, Joel Black finds the commercial hit *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1990) has its origins in underground snuff originals, and Tony Williams explores Larry Cohen's debt to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) in *Special Effects* (1984), reminding us that the master's techniques 'were originally regarded as the equivalent of today's underground ... in the conservative world of British cinema' (p. 55).

There is more than a passing sense of idealistic disappointment in several contributions that the litany of names who have 'sold out' to commercial interests (David Lynch, the Coen brothers, Gus Van Sant, John Waters, Steven Soderbergh) have lost an edge that only 'authentic' independence can lend. However, in an interview with Mendik, gore specialist Herschell Gordon Lewis surely echoes many underground voices when he remarks: 'from a filmmaker's point of view, we writhe in envy when we see big budget effects we could never have been able to afford' (p. 190).

As a key exponent of cheap budget horror, George A. Romero, like Tobe Hooper (director of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* [1974]), is considered a pioneer of 'splatter'. That his entire oeuvre (examined in dutiful detail by Tony Williams) treads the precipitous tightrope between 'bad' and just plain bad, is evidenced by this exhaustive account of his successes and (conspicuous) failures. Of *There's Always Vanilla* (1972) Williams writes: 'Romero regards the film as both an artistic and commercial failure' (p. 33). *Jack's Wife* (1973) is described as 'another of Romero's ill-fated ventures that sought to break away from horror films' (p. 47). *The Crazies* (1973) is, again, according to the director, 'a rushed film lacking cohesive structure' (p. 59), while *Monkey Shines* (1988) might be dismissed 'as one of Romero's failed works deserving little attention [but] is by no means a total failure' (p. 141). Certainly Williams lavishes attention on the positive

achievements of the celebrated *Living Dead* trilogy, and makes claims for Romero's social-realist critique of American family values beneath the surface gore. Moreover, his elaborate textual reading invokes thematic and stylistic links with the naturalism of Emile Zola (a writer Romero has never read), but disappointingly offers little in the way of contextual production histories. His employment of influences from EC comics might sustain more convincing cultural comparison, but this book-length study stretches textual material beyond its limits, while neglecting the considerable matters of Romero's influence and fan reception.

Audience study also receives relatively scant attention in *Underground USA*. One senses in this volume that while the aesthetics, production practices and underground exhibition circuits of the 'artistic' avant garde are grounded in an implicit subculture ('the scene' and the film co-op), the cultish appeals of gore and gross-out are rather lost in the aura of their very excess. Indeed, Sara Gwenllian Jones is the only writer to directly address fan consumption here, and, ironically, it is such mainstream fare as *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and *Xena: Warrior Princess* that illustrate her nonetheless persuasive case. Her thesis (and it is one that contests much of what is implied, though unacknowledged, elsewhere in this book) is that fan practices (like independent filmmakers) are rarely either as blithely complicit or radically challenging as imposed, rigid and binary cultural distinctions might pretend.

Similar territory, and a similar difficulty in negotiating definitions and cultural parameters, is explored in *Defining Cult Movies: the Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (edited by Mark Jancovich et al.). As this book demonstrates, cult film fandom crosses national borders, class and gender divisions, popular, arthouse and exploitation cinemas, the marketplace, the underground and the academy. The volume arose from a highly successful conference organized by Jancovich in conjunction with the Broadway Cinema, Nottingham in November 2000.¹ The particular pleasure of that gathering was in the broad range of offerings from international scholars, rather than any synthetic outcomes. As a book-of-the-conference, this work similarly resists tidy definitions; but such pragmatic resistance – in principle laudable – in practice appears to be rather evasive. If cult is largely 'classified in consumption' (p. 1), where is the evidence? What is it that fans do with these films that makes them different? What kinds of cultural capital does cultism produce? As it is, the territory mapped here seems to assume an unwritten consensus (around art and exploitation cinemas), that threatens to collapse into an academic litany of 'strange films I rather like'. Indeed, the role of the academic in this project comes under self-conscious scrutiny from the start.

Jeffrey Sconce recommends the benefits of 'teaching "bad" movies to good students' – perhaps a refreshing reversal of most pedagogic fortunes. Yet while Dwain Esper's 1934 sexploitation film *Maniac* may

¹ Reported by Paul Grainge, *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), pp. 227–9.

be an object lesson in narrative defamiliarization, 'where history and technique remove students from the "effects" of representation and plunge them headlong into the quagmire of signification itself' (p. 31), surely the same educative pay-off could be achieved with any number of art films, irrespective of whether they are also cult objects. Disjunctive narratives (though not infrequent in cult films) are a feature, whether by accident or design, of some of the best, as well as the worst, independent films. How does this address the cult film phenomenon which, as Sconce rightly suggests, 'has less to do with a body of work than with the emergence of a particular reading protocol'? His answer lies in aligning 'the relative homogeneity 'of the cult audience ('white, middle-class men') with 'legitimate film scholars' (p. 31).

We all pledge rather strict and long-lasting allegiance to a certain theoretical paradigm (or worse, to a set of unquestioned beliefs), returning again and again to the favourite films, directors, issues, rhetoric, theories and theorists on which we have fixated. (p. 31)

This simplistic analogy does little to flatter (much less explain) either community. Rather, it elides their considerable discursive and institutional distinctions and panders to the kind of intellectual navel-gazing which the feminist critiques of (respectively) Joanne Hollows and Jacinda Read are only too keen to de-bunk.

While Hollows rightly condemns the ludicrous (male) orgasm metaphor employed by Harper and Mendik in their Introduction to the recent *Unruly Pleasures*,² Read exposes the self-consciously 'laddish' defence by Ian Hunter of *Showgirls* in the same volume (a work, which, as a whole, seems determined to position itself in a libidinous limbo between academia and fandom). Yet if male academics appear to struggle in erecting a legitimate discursive space to debate cultism, feminist scholars are guilty of polarization. Hollows argues that oppositions between cult formations and mainstream tastes are not only class-ridden but gender-biased: 'In much criticism, mainstream cinema is imagined as feminized mass culture and cult as a heroic and masculinized subculture'. Thus, 'cult would seem to reproduce existing power structures rather than simply challenge them' (p. 37). Simply? Not only does this supposition fly in the face of clear evidence of the target audience for the Hollywood blockbuster, it glosses over the real and complex gender politics *within* cult fan communities, as my forthcoming work on *The Wicker Man* will demonstrate. If the 'masculinized' subcultural spaces and fan competences of cult communities are exclusive of feminized intervention, little acknowledgement is made here of the specific strategies and practices female fans adopt to address their own investments in cultism. Elsewhere in this volume, Rebecca Feasey (writing on the star-derogation of Sharon Stone in *Bad Movies We Love*) concludes that in order for women to 'participate within' the 'boy's game' that is 'cult

² See Xavier Mendik and Graeme Harper (eds), *Unruly Pleasures: the Cult Film and its Critics* (Guildford: FAB Press, 2000).

movie fandom' they 'must distance themselves from, and disavow, their own femininity' (p. 183). I would contend that, while perhaps true for some kinds of cult fan community, this generalization belies the range and complexity of genuine female cult fan practices. To acknowledge that such subcultures are sites of gendered, as well as other kinds of political, struggle is but the beginning of a much deeper and necessarily more focused debate.

Harmony H. Wu's fascinating exploration of the distinctive oeuvre of 'cult' director Peter Jackson investigates its critical placement in New Zealand national cinema and, promisingly, the variety of fan responses to his work. Not the first writer to invoke Sconce (his contribution to cult theory is as much a real presence as Bourdieu's is a ghostly spectre in this book), Wu employs his productive dichotomy between archaeological cinephilia (obsession with collecting and artefacts) and diegetic cinephilia (profound investment in narrative and character and the extension of these in original creative works). Yet here, where gender comes to the fore in the rehearsal of distinctive fan competences, Wu disappointingly fails to make the connection explicit.

Other writers also choose to focus on the problematic figure of the cult auteur. As with genre investments in cult explanation, auteurism is relevant, but scarcely tells the whole story. More cult films are born of fan appropriation than are made by maverick directors. Nevertheless, Ernest Mathijs (on Cronenberg), Peter Hutchings (on Argento) and Moya Luckett (on Wishman) each make strong cases. Mathijs's piece concentrates on the critical reception of *Shivers* and its public contribution to the film's cult status. Luckett draws persuasive arguments from close readings of Wishman's exploitation films about their feminine modes of address, but her textual rigour remains unsupported by any reception evidence – was there a female audience for Wishman, and if so, where?

Hutchings, in by far the most incisive intervention in the debate, warns that loose definitions of cult which may (as this volume proves) permit 'the linking together of an array of cultural objects between which otherwise there is no obvious connection', has the deleterious effect of obscuring 'the specificity of localised "cult" responses to particular objects in favour of constructing a broader picture of cultural resistance and transgression' (pp. 127–8). While Argento fans rarely progress beyond reiterating the 'masterly' status of their hero, Hutchings's thorough approach here demonstrates the necessary textual and contextual work that needs to be practised at the local level if any understanding of the specificity of cultism is to be achieved.

As with Argento, Andy Willis's survey of Spanish horror shares with those chapters by Mark Betz (on American marketing of European art films) and Joan Hawkins (on New York's underground) another aspect of Sconce's 'paracinema' theory – exhibition and consumption parallels and textual similarities between some cult and avant-garde cinemas.³ Interesting though each example is on its own terms,

³ See Jeffrey Sconce, '"Trashing" the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 371–93.

however, none raises the cult phenomenon much above the common subcultural terrain. Meanwhile, Leon Hunt's tribute to Hong Kong martial arts films introduces a useful conceptual distinction between different kinds of authenticity in martial arts display and fan valorization.

Even in resisting easy definitions, generalities accrue their own representative orthodoxy. I, for one, am not convinced that the caricature of the cult fan as a white, middle-class, male declaimer of oppositional 'trash' aesthetics either covers the scope of cult's true reception ambit or, crucially, attends in enough detail to specific case studies of cult behaviours. One welcome exception to this rule is Nathan Hunt's reading of science fiction fan practices. His account incorporates Sarah Thornton's work on dance subcultures to illuminate the ways in which fans construct internal hierarchies of knowledge and competences, and community borders which are policed through the use of fan collectables and 'trivia'.⁴ Hunt's (commercial) example of *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* illustrates perfectly the perceived threat to fan communities of mainstream popularity and how the cultural capital of fan knowledge is marshalled via fanzines and commercial publications to defend its exclusivity.

This returns us to fundamental issues of cult definition. Cultural theory, as Gwenllian Jones illustrates, tends to reduce real distinctions (for example between the discourses of cultism, the avant garde and academia) to conceptual antinomies of struggle and resistance, opposition and mainstream. Concrete evidence of the personal needs satisfied by cultism will only emerge from detailed work on specific texts and fan responses to them. Finally, there is a need to consider the historical dimension. Why do film texts which access certain kinds of feeling (cult registers) emerge at specific cultural moments? It seems to me that the kind of questions that need to be asked about cult films cannot be answered by reference alone to exploitation genres and trash aesthetics in the service of subcultural opposition.

⁴ See Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures*. London: Sage, 2002, 182 pp.

GRAEME TURNER

While this might once have been quite a provocative title, there have been a number of books with similar titles lately, gesturing towards a gathering conversation between cultural studies and film studies. It suggests that a significant shift has occurred, defusing the old antagonisms between film studies and cultural studies – in particular over the category of the aesthetic. Although the problem of the aesthetic still lingers in various forms within both critical traditions, the methodological space between film studies and cultural studies seems to have shrunk in recent years. If this is so, it is has been least problematic where cultural studies has helped to model new approaches to the study of film audiences, and where this in turn is integrated with some form of historiography or sociology of consumption. Through such connections, an interest in film as a social practice, in the cinema as a complex and contingent cultural and social space or, perhaps less comfortably, in the relation between audiences and the pleasures of the mass-mediated film text, has been prosecuted. This tendency is perhaps most pronounced in the UK, where it is highly visible in undergraduate programmes which take an approach broadly inflected by cultural studies to interrogate the ways in which film studies might deal with the popular (and not just the 'classic') text.

But there are limits. At times, it still feels as if an unspoken agreement is observed as a way of allowing film studies, cultural studies, media studies and various other disciplinary players such as political economy to just get along – for the moment at least. As a result, I initially misunderstood Harbord's title: it created the expectation of a book that would interest itself primarily in the popular cinema – in global Hollywood and its audiences. In fact, it is a far more original contribution: a book which takes seriously the benefits of

approaches from cultural theory, media history and sociology, as well as political economies of the media, but which is nonetheless located squarely in the philosophical heart of British film studies.

At its simplest, though, Harbord's project looks like a cultural one: to consider how film enters our lives. She steps aside from the more conventional perspectives – the analysis of specific film texts on the one hand, and of audience behaviour on the other – in order to focus on 'film cultures': what she outlines as the distinct but interrelated discursive formations through which we become film audiences. These formations are culturally embedded, with their own social histories. They organize the distribution and consumption of film as a practice which occurs in 'spatial and psychological contexts of social hierarchy and distinction' (p. 2). The reference to Bourdieu's concept of distinction is explicit, and developed at some length, but Harbord is also interested in the structure and sociology of the industry itself. What she means by 'film cultures' is not only social, but industrial, institutional, commercial and, in a less defined way, aesthetic. It also has a historical dimension, a product of the conflict between commerce and culture played out in the early twentieth-century history of film and inflecting contemporary engagement with the postmodern aestheticization of the everyday.

It is in relation to the everyday that Harbord locates much of her project. In attempting to understand how our experiences with film might begin while we are 'waiting at the bus stop on the way to the multiplex', Harbord's main focus throughout this book is upon tracing the 'circulation of film in distribution, exhibition, official competition and marketing; sites where the value of film is produced and are yet elusive to trace' (p. 2). The circulation of film, she says, 'whilst not strictly determined or fixed', delivers 'different film cultures to locations with diverse symbolic status'. Hence, the multiplex in the shopping centre on the outskirts of town folds the consumption of film into the experience of shopping, 'locating film within the context of commodity culture' and leisure (p. 3). While as audiences we might participate in a range of film cultures, we also adopt patterns of consumption that reflect our greater comfort and familiarity with one context rather than another. In the case studies used to demonstrate the value of her approach, Harbord focuses upon three such sites: the film festival, the multiplex, and the art-house cinema or art gallery. This does place a great deal of analytical weight upon the site of exhibition. Indeed, Harbord acknowledges the need to defend her emphasis upon dealing with these sites as social spaces or domains of circulation – rather than a more conventional argument which might, for instance, understand them through the profile of the texts they exhibit. It is precisely how these sites are discursively distinguished as specific cultural formations, she argues, that gives them their function, their place in a system of institutional sites, paths of circulation and formations of taste.

The clearest demonstration of Harbord's approach occurs in the chapter on film festivals. Here the discursive structures are compressed and contained under the pressure of generating a coherent media event, so it is possible for Harbord simply to list the kinds of formations that go towards constituting the film festival culture. She points to the discourses of independent filmmaking, referencing the avant garde and articulating an opposition to bourgeois culture, nationalism and commercialism. A second group of discourses is generated by press and magazine accounts of the event, and this concentrates on the controversial, the new and the spectacular. The discourse of the movie business is third, circulated through the trade press and privileging issues of price, intricacies of contracts and so on. Fourth, are the discourses of tourism and other means of creating a connection between the festival and its specific location. Not an exhaustive or even a particularly surprising list, perhaps, but enough to give a preliminary sense of how Harbord might conceptualize 'what we experience ... as the media event of film festivals' (p. 60). She then puts flesh on these bones by presenting a much more detailed history of precisely such discursive formations as they were implicated in the establishment of the International Film Festival Berlin in the context of the rebuilding of Europe after World War II. As this history demonstrates, these are only starting points. The tension between the festival as 'event', its implication in the articulation of national cultures, and, ultimately, its thorough incorporation into the spatial practices of tourism all set up conflicts of focus and definition that take place at some distance from the film texts themselves but which must nonetheless exercise determining influences over the meanings generated by the contexts of their consumption.

In the final chapter, Janet Harbord acknowledges the large claims that have been made for the cultural impact of the digitalization of media products: the link between digital media and the return of the avant garde, and the active audience argument which suggests that digitalization will actually reconfigure our relation to the real. Rather than accepting that digitalization constitutes an eruptive and categoric shift, she insists upon its established institutional location – its ultimate incorporation into the film cultures her book describes. Resisting the technological boosterism of so much new media commentary, she places digitalization within the 'main dialectic' at work in her book: 'the tension between tradition and revolution, transformation and stasis, modernism and postmodernism' (pp. 159–60). In a move typical of her practice throughout *Film Cultures*, Harbord then shifts focus from the philosophical context in which her analysis operates to concrete examples of the industrial shifts to which she refers. In this case it is to argue that, 'rather than eclipsing twentieth-century traditions of filmmaking, digitalization is utilized within existing spheres of production: in large Hollywood films, digital effects enhance the ability to stage the epic film and historical stories, such as *Gladiator* and

Titanic, where spectacle and heroism are entwined' (p. 160). It is a representative moment that demonstrates Harbord's determination to think about the relations between film and its discursive contexts from multiple perspectives. This is an impressive and disciplined achievement, richly referential, and it constitutes a highly significant contribution to the reformulation of film studies.

Film Cultures is a densely argued book and it deals with a wider range of issues than I have addressed in this review. For instance, the 'collision' between modernism and postmodernism – a conflict between narratives of fixity or fluidity, between mobility and stasis, and (interestingly) between networks of flow and centres of production – is productively integrated into the discussion of the relationship between film, cultural policy and the formation of national cultures. For someone approaching this book from the perspective of cultural studies, however, the value of *Film Cultures* is that it sets the film text aside for the moment in order to investigate how we might think of film as a product of cultural systems or practices which also produce, disseminate and generate meanings of their own. The category of the aesthetic returns, late in the book, so there is no question that Harbord is offering us an account which simply instrumentalizes these systems. In the end, Harbord produces an extremely valuable account of film cultures that is grounded within film theory as well as within the more empirical industrial studies that have marked film history. The book will be an important contributor to both traditions.

Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (eds), *The German Cinema Book*. London: British Film Institute, 2002, 291 pp.

JULIA KNIGHT

In recent years there have been a number of books published that seem, on the evidence of their titles, to tackle the entire history of German cinema – among others, Thomas Elsaesser's and Michael Wedel's *The BFI Companion to German Cinema* (1999), Sabine Hake's *German National Cinema* (Routledge, 2002), and now this one, *The German Cinema Book*. Given the complexity of German film history (not to mention the fact that many books have been written about single periods within that history), this would seem a virtually impossible task. But the editors confront this problem in their opening paragraph:

One could argue that Germany's fractured political history through the twentieth century makes it next to impossible to trace a national film history in straightforwardly linear terms, since the very definition of Germanness has to negotiate not only continuities, but also a plethora of different cultural, ideological and geographical contexts and ruptures across different periods. (p. 1)

So why attempt the 'next to impossible'? A prime reason is to address the gaps left by the existing literature. Overwhelmingly the previous literature has focused on the Weimar, Nazi and New German Cinema eras, omitting, as the editors go on to assert, 'not only entire decades of film production, but also a tradition in German cinema which is centred on popular genres and stars' (p. 2). For instance, German comedies have been the 'bread and butter' of the German film industry throughout its history, but according to one of the book's contributors, Jan-Christopher Horak, the German film comedy has been more or less universally dismissed as unworthy of critical attention. Horak attributes this partly to an 'intellectual disdain for genre cinema in general' on

1 *Otto – Der Film* (1985, directed by Otto Waalkes and Rainer Fassbinder's former cameraman, Xaver Schwarzenberger. The film's success also prompted a sequel two years later, *Otto – Der Neue Film* (1987), again codirected by Waalkes and Schwarzenberger.

2 Gerald Clarke, 'Seeking planets that do not exist: the New German Cinema is the liveliest in Europe', *Time*, 20 March 1978, p. 51.

the part of the Germans themselves, but argues it is also due to German comedies not exporting well. As he asserts: 'Who outside Germany knows Otto Waalkes?' (p. 29). Yet Waalkes is an enormously popular television comedian in Germany who starred in and codirected one of the most successful German films of the 1980s, *Otto – Der Film/Otto – the Film* (1985), a light-hearted slapstick comedy about a bumbling, hapless East Friesian freshly arrived in the big city.¹ The film attracted an audience of over eight million on the domestic market and won a prize for record attendance figures.

Furthermore, a central argument informing and structuring the book is that the periodizations marked out and reinforced by the previous literature tend to construct those eras of German cinema as separate, different from each other, functioning in isolation from one another. This perception is very evident in Fassbinder's now famed assertion, quoted in *Time* magazine in 1978: 'We had nothing, and we started with nothing. . . . For a generation nobody made important films in Germany. Until us.'² Even where some of the gaps are starting to be filled in, the wider contextualizing perspective is, with rare exceptions, still lacking. In contrast, although the editors are very aware of the ruptures that have certainly split the history of German cinema into identifiable periods, they argue here – and present as a major project of the book – that it is necessary to 'trace film-historical continuities as well as ruptures'. At the same time, they note that there is also an assumed 'synchronicity between German film history's ruptures and breaks, and the caesurae of German political history'. Whilst they acknowledge it is of course impossible to ignore, for instance, the way in which film was harnessed to ideological ends during the Nazi period, it is also important to explore the 'discontinuities as well as convergences between cinema and the politico-economic history of the German nation' (p. 9). And to help facilitate the book's aims, the editors have organized it into five thematic sections – popular cinema, stars, institutions and cultural contexts, cultural politics, transnational connections – each of which follows a chronological span from Wilhelmine and Weimar cinema through the twentieth century to, in most cases, post-unification German cinema.

Hence *The German Cinema Book* is not a linear documentation of the entirety of German film history, but rather about enabling the reader to make connections across different eras and contexts whilst engaging with the specifics of individual case studies. So, for instance, by focusing on the pre-1907 era, Joseph Garncarz explores how film exhibition in Germany developed through the dual routes of variety theatres and travelling shows, which together paved the way for the development of cinema as a mass medium with prestige value. When cinemas started to open in 1905, audiences were already well-acquainted with film and frequented all three film exhibition outlets for a decade or more before cinemas captured the market and marginalized the earlier exhibition forms. Elsewhere Ian Garwood counters the

conventional opposition between, and separation of, New German Cinema and post-Wall cinema through an analysis of Wim Wenders's *Der Himmel über Berlin/Wings of Desire* (1987) and Tom Twyker's *Lola rennt/Run, Lola, Run* (1998). While he acknowledges there are easily identifiable thematic and cultural differences, as well as differences with regard to their respective production contexts, Garwood asserts both films share the search for a 'useable story', the desire to incorporate new narrative forms into cinema and a search for ways to address their audiences.

Unsurprisingly, in the process, the book addresses some popular misconceptions, notably the way in which the *Heimat* film genre, especially those films made during the 1950s, are frequently considered, sometimes dismissed as, escapist. Given the upheavals and traumas of World War II and the resulting desire to forget the recent past, this is hardly surprising. However, Johannes von Moltke in his essay reconsiders the 1950s *Heimat* films to suggest that while they often appear to offer romanticized and idealized images of rural landscapes and communities, they regularly contain modern 'contaminations'. In doing so, he argues that the films help to naturalize the effects of modernization rather than hold them at bay: 'The undeniable political conservatism of such films ... consists not in an anti-modern stance, but in the selective embrace of the modern and in the mythologisation of modernisation as a process that ultimately does not threaten the underlying sense of continuity and *Gemeinschaft*'. Thus he concludes that a project of 'nostalgic modernisation' lies at the heart of the *Heimat* genre which is 'custom-made for the *Wirtschaftswunder*' (p. 24). Essentially, he is identifying *Heimat* films as mythic narratives. This is an approach Thomas Schatz has productively employed, drawing on the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, to analyze US film genres,³ and he argues in a similar vein that such films can be viewed as 'vehicle[s] ... for the airing of ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions' (p. 19).

Each of the thematic sections is also usefully prefaced by an introduction which both draws together the common threads and continuities, and contextualizes the theme and attendant debates. For instance, in the introduction to the 'Stars' section, Erica Carter highlights how German cinema under UFA built up a star system that more or less mirrored that of Hollywood, yet displayed nationally distinctive elements through, for instance, looser contractual arrangements resulting in stars being positioned more as creative artists, the role of the theatre in training film actors and actresses, and their perceived capacity via their 'extraordinariness' to 'embody the cultural values of nation' (p. 60). Within this context, the section includes fascinating discussions of (amongst others) Heinz Rühmann, unknown outside Germany, and Armin Mueller-Stahl, now an international star through European films such as Agnieszka Holland's *Bittere Ernte/ Angry Harvest* (West Germany, 1985) and the success of

³ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System* (New York, NY: Random House, 1981).

US films such as Costa-Gavras's *Music Box* (1989). While Rühmann became known through a long string of light comedies spanning the Nazi era and through into the 1960s as the embodiment of the German 'little man', Mueller-Stahl made a name for himself in GDR films playing 'broken heroes' (p. 92) – on several occasions in the form of an antifascist resistance fighter – and subsequently, after emigrating to the West in 1980, as a much sought-after character actor, often playing East Europeans. Despite their obvious differences, the two men have shared an ability to become and remain stars across very different eras and contexts.

Among the other numerous interesting contributions are Ulrike Sieglohr's discussion of Ulrike Ottinger, which productively positions her between the women's cinema of the late 1970s and early 1980s, loosely aligned with the New German Cinema, and the avant-garde practices of the Other Cinema, and explores her transition from non-realist fantasy films to documentary filmmaking. Peter Krämer's essay revisits the relationship between Hollywood and the German film industry to argue that some of Hollywood's production preferences actually favoured the employment of German emigre film personnel, while before the 1970s only a minority of the top films in Germany were Hollywood productions. The final essay in the collection is Deniz Göktürk's illuminating exploration of Turkish-German filmmaking, which has become a growing phenomenon. She argues that German-Turkish relations have tended to be configured in terms of gender relations and suggests that while Turks in German cinema may no longer be one dimensional – especially as new young Turkish filmmakers started to make their mark in the late 1990s – female characters tend to remain in the limited position of being caught between two cultures.

My main criticism of *The German Cinema Book* is the relative brevity of the individual essays. Obviously this has been a necessary evil, to balance scope with the size and resulting cost of the book. But at times it leaves the reader frustratingly short on depth or detail. One example that springs to mind is in the aforementioned essay on Heinz Rühmann, in which reference is made to the fact that 'his career ran into trouble when he came under pressure from the Nazi authorities because of his Jewish wife. After he divorced her in 1938, he was back in good standing' (p. 82). One is left wanting to know if and how the offscreen realities affected his star image both during the Nazi era and after. This gripe aside, it has to be said that the book is a fascinating delve into the history of German cinema and its practices, with much to recommend it. Its approach usefully locates individual case studies in the wider historical and international contexts, and thereby highlights the range of factors and issues that have shaped German film culture, interrogating the boundaries of a national cinema in the process. Importantly, it recontextualizes those periods of German cinema that

have been privileged in so many previous studies. And with its useful cross-referencing between essays, it is a valuable resource for both student and researcher alike. The editors are to be congratulated on bringing together such an informative and readable collection of essays.

Antje Ascheid, *Hitler's Heroines: Stardom and Womanhood in Nazi Germany*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003, 274 pp.

Joshua Feinsteini, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema 1949–1989*. Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 352 pp.

Randall Halle and Margaret McCarthy (eds), *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003, 400 pp.

Lutz Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema Between Hitler and Hollywood*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002, 332 pp.

Rainer Rother, *Leni Riefenstahl: the Seduction of Genius*, trans. Martin H. Bott. (Originally German publication Henschel, 2000.) London: Continuum, 2002, 288 pp.

ULRIKE SIEGLOHR

A collection of recent books that at first sight seem to have little in common other than being about German cinema poses a challenge to identify common concerns, but also offers an opportunity to assess heuristic values of current dominant paradigms in film studies. Despite the range of subject matter – a biography of Riefenstahl; a study of Nazi cinema in relation to Hollywood; case studies of film divas in the Third Reich; the role of ‘the ordinary’ in the films of the former GDR; an anthology of essays on popular German cinema ranging from director Joe May to *Run Lola Run* – all but the biography undermine unproblematic historical periodization to reassess German cinema’s recurring and problematic relationship to the popular from a broad cultural studies perspective.¹ Renegotiating popular German, or any other national, cinema is not a new project,² but as these books testify it is reaching critical mass through research into such diverse issues as

¹ For a comparison, see also the excellent anthology, reviewed separately in this issue, by Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (eds), *The German Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2002).

² See Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992).

the international dimension of the 1930s German film industry, the exportability of stars, the canon as popular texts, the relation of Hollywood to the national popular cinema, and the intertwining of Nazi ideology or the GDR political beliefs with popular narrative traditions. Running through most of these studies is an engagement with the notion of a popular German cinema that not only invokes Goebbels's famous Third Reich dictum that propaganda is most effective when cast as entertainment, but also confronts entrenched high-cultural conceptions that films should foster *Bildung* (the Enlightenment ideal of a humanities education in service of citizenship) as it elevates cinema into an art form.

This more inclusive approach towards a new German film history has to be understood within the broader area of 'the new film history' identified by Thomas Elsaesser in 1986:

To do film history today, one has to become a historian, a legal expert, a sociologist, an architectural historian, know about censorship and fiscal policy, read trade papers and fan magazines, even study Lloyds Lists of ships sunk during World War One to calculate how much of the film footage exported to Europe actually reached its destination.³

Cinema here is perceived as a nexus of interlocking social, economic and legal systems at particular historical junctures. This in turn requires that scholars engage with primary research in archives rather than exploring film through paradigms such as structuralism and psychoanalysis. Since the mid 1980s, speculative theories and formal approaches – the orthodoxies of 1970s film theories – have been increasingly displaced by detailed and concrete research. Ten years after Elsaesser, Anton Kaes proposed promoting concrete, local and partial knowledge to challenge any claims of an all-encompassing theory 'about the culture of other countries'.⁴ Stressing the dynamic relationship between determinants and warning against a facile distinction between text and context,⁵ he advocated a break from self-contained studies to allow for an investigation of 'the conditions and functions of a film's manifest appearance in a certain place at a certain time ... [and of] the historical fields where films coexist with other forms of visual culture and other representations of the cultural and social realm'.⁶

Interestingly this 'new film history' recasts the earlier concerns of the 'old' film history, especially the sociological emphasis of Siegfried Kracauer's methodology, itself influenced by Emilie Altenloh's very comprehensive 1914 study, 'A sociology of the cinema: the audience'.⁷ A number of the books under review here, with their interest in film as a medium for popular consumption and its perceived impact on audiences, and in the sociopolitical role of a mass medium promoting entertainment, are clearly influenced by Kracauer, and indeed Adorno.

³ Thomas Elsaesser, 'The new film history', *Sight & Sound*, vol. 55, no. 4 (1986), p. 248.

⁴ Anton Kaes, 'German cultural history and the study of film: ten theses and a postscript', *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995), p. 50.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷ See the translation of the second part of 'A sociology of the cinema: the audience' in *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2001), pp. 249–93.

Characteristically, all of the books go back to primary sources in archives to reassess existing views and material. Most obviously, attention to detailed original documents is the implicit justification for Rainer Rother's biography of Riefenstahl. The author is the film programme director and curator of the German Historical Museum in Berlin, and, perhaps not surprisingly, he privileges political history rather than film history for his account of this controversial filmmaker. Although the bibliography is comprehensive and includes German and Anglo-US film scholarship, scant space is devoted in the text to discussing this work, and Rother seems to be more at ease exploring the compromised status of Riefenstahl's films by examining the archival sources for political insights and for production details than in intervening in the ongoing film-historical debates about the complex relationship between ideology and aesthetics exemplified by her films.

Unlike Rother's book, which is mainly aimed at the German historian and reader already familiar with the period rather than at the non-German film scholar, Joshua Feinstein's book is more genuinely film history. With impressively detailed documentation exploiting the newly opened archives and interviews with East German directors, actors and state officials, Feinstein provides a film-historical account of one very specific cinema's role in the construction of a national self-definition and an analysis of the 'the complex political and institutional factors that allowed the work's production in the first place' (p. 14). The key issues Feinstein addresses are: how identity is constructed from zero in a 'new' society, how the GDR responded to external changes, and the place of art in a socialist society. During the 1950s, the German Film Corporation DEFA's primary function was to provide entertainment rather than direct political education, and within this context popular entertainment was recast as 'uplifting', with a political obligation to develop a 'civic imaginary' for a new society.

Feinstein's book traces how complex ideological and historical changes nationally (for example, the construction of the Wall in 1961) and internationally (the 1968 entry of Soviet tanks into Prague) effected both DEFA's cultural production and the reception of its cinema, and thus how that cinema was never quite controlled by the Party (SED/Socialist Unity Party of Germany). Although often his approach is thematic, he carefully avoids any notion of films reflecting a pre-existing reality, and pays attention to aesthetics such as the documentary mode of neorealism. For Feinstein the key to understanding DEFA is its social role, first in the manner in which the films brought together German cinema traditions and the needs of the state, and second in its function as a public sphere,⁸ albeit a limited and Party-choreographed one (p. 221). He discusses at length what is a stake in the basic shift from the late 1940s films about contemporary life (emblematic and dynamic pointing to the future) to the late 1950s films of everyday life (suggesting a more ahistorical dimension). A particularly interesting account is that of the Italian neorealist-inspired

⁸ Interesting comparisons could be made to the New German Cinema of the 1970s in West Germany.

Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser (1957), a film praised by reviewers for its authentic depiction of disaffected youth, and which Feinstein draws on to identify some of the ambivalences underpinning contemporary debates about realism. For, unlike the reviewers, Party criticism of the film was much more negative and clearly shows how by the late 1950s DEFA's depiction of contemporary issues had become problematic for the Party – in this case 'realism' no longer conveyed the former utopian ideals, but portrayed instead rebellious youth who demonstrated their affinities with western capitalist values. More generally, while the Party endorsed social realism (as historically transcendent and in opposition to surface realism), opinions were divided as to how far the raw neorealist aesthetics successfully contributed to create in the individual a desire to participate in the new socialist society rather than merely recognize and live with the everyday present, 'the ordinary' (p. 52). However, it was not until 1965, at the eleventh Plenum Party Congress, that the Party directly intervened in DEFA, replacing key personnel and banning several films. The subsequent decline of DEFA came about as it grew less and less in touch with East German sensibilities and sought to impose, rather than merely promote, a socialist project through films. Not surprisingly, when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 the films that had been banned were initially released to great critical acclaim, then came the bitter satires of the *Wende* (the transition from GDR to FDR). Now fifteen years after the end of DEFA and GDR society, the reunited Germany is witnessing a nostalgic longing for the East (*Ostalgie*) and its cultural products are lovingly recreated in television shows and films. *Good-Bye, Lenin* (Wolfgang Lecker, 2002), the Oscar-winning film with its knowing fantasies of a GDR socialist utopia, is the most interesting example, and no doubt as the reality of Germany in recession gathers momentum, this unfulfilled dream lingers on in the civic imaginary of the former GDR citizens.

Unlike the two individual histories so far discussed, *Light Motives* is a revisionist anthology which, with its range of cultural theories and interdisciplinary underpinnings, and emphasis on commercial entertainment films and thus its implicit concern with reception, is exemplary of the New German Film History approaches. The editors' 'Introduction' not only provides a succinct summary of German film studies, it also offers a lucid exposition of the Frankfurt School critical legacy and especially of the 'popular' and its contested meaning in German culture, defining it not as content but as structures: 'not what the popular "is" but what it "does"' (p. xiv). This theoretically nuanced and historically informed discussion of the concept – set in relation to, rather than as distinct from, Hollywood – and of the claims for a populist mode of address as offering unrestricted access to knowledge, is relevant beyond the specifics of German cinema.

The anthology covers popular film in reference to topics such as 'mass appeal, entertainment value, political economy, industrial

structure, mediating quality, relation to subculture, ability to organize knowledge, role in mediating elite versus popular knowledge' (p. xiv) and most of the essays feature lively textual analyses to support the authors' theses about the films' wider cultural significance. Attractive as all of this is in principle, in practice there are some problems with the book's organization. Although the editors identify groups of topics in their introduction, they organize the contributions chronologically, and some determination and prior knowledge is required to identify interlinking areas of interest. The eclectic topics range from tourism in 1930s mountain films to spatial politics and identity in the 1950s, and from sex manuals and B-movies in the 1960s to transcultural filmmaking in the 1990s.

Antje Ascheid and Lutz Koepnick, who are contributors to this anthology, are also the authors of the two remaining monographs under review, and the ways in which their respective methodologies yield quite different knowledge about the same topic make for a stimulating comparison.

Ascheid's *Hitler's Heroines* draws on feminist film studies/theory and cultural studies methodologies to explore the inherent ideological contradictions between the Nazi ideal of womanhood as sacrificing and self-effacing and the complex functions of female stars in the Third Reich cinema: 'It is through the paradigm of the female star that womanhood mostly clearly articulates itself as one of the central areas of contestation in fascist Germany' (p. 41). This confident study considers how National Socialism co-opted mass entertainment and negotiated the alluring pleasures of female stars to sustain its own popularity, and is scholarly in assessing different paradigms of films/stars and society. Central to the book is its examination of three prominent and popular stars – Kristina Söderbaum, Lilian Harvey, and Zara Leander – whose 'varying generic characteristics ... reach across a wide spectrum of female images circulated through stars under the National Socialist regime' (p. 8). The three stars are aptly chosen to identify the contradictions and tensions within their star personae. Thus the Aryan-looking Swedish Söderbaum,⁹ wife of the most notorious Nazi director Veit Harlan and starring in his propaganda films (including *Jud Süß* and *Opfergang/The Sacrifice*), at first appears to fit the Nazi prototype; however, her melodramatic performance style engenders not just a positive conformity but also its tragic opposite. In succeeding Nazi ideological containment, Söderbaum comes inadvertently to address the 'real' experience of ordinary German women – 'not an idealized super female, but the tragic embodiment of fascist misogyny' (p. 49).

The star persona of the British-born comedian Harvey, a former Weimar and Hollywood star, suggests continuities with 1920s modernity and international glamour. Her roles (including a Hollywood remake and gender-bending) alongside her discursive construction, clearly undermine the essentialist and parochial ideals of Nazi

⁹ This is a version of the chapter on Söderbaum in *Light Motives*.

womanhood, and thus indicate the ideological straining required by National Socialist cinema to combine enduring popular modernist ideals with a Nazi 'redescription of femininity' (p. 9).

For Ascheid the Swedish actress and singer Leander, groomed as the successor to the exiled Marlene Dietrich, offers 'arguably Nazism's biggest and most complicated star persona' (p. 9). Although starting out as a manufactured diva, she became one of the most popular and profitable stars of the Nazi period; moreover, her immense appeal continued into the postwar era – especially with the gay community who adored her 'masculine' voice. Her star persona oscillated between notoriety and saintliness, and being an alluring singer Leander promoted the pleasures of antagonistic spectatorship. While the narratives are in the service of Nazi ideology, her seductive appeal to audiences, particularly her provocative songs which articulate individual pain and selfish passion, seem to exceed the objectives of an ideology that demands private sacrifice and female subjugation. Her star image was directly in opposition to the Nazi ideal of womanhood.¹⁰ Like other stars of the period, she has a dual persona, caught in the tension between repressive notion of Third Reich ideals of femininity and playing to the 'countervailing fantasies and appetites of Third Reich viewers ... carefully monitored and yet seemingly impossible to contain' (p. 161).

Ascheid's excellent study achieves a good balance – she is confident with theory and her close readings of texts are illuminating and convincing. She concludes her book with the claim that unlike the heavily censored 'high arts', 'low' art forms of entertainment received less consistent ideological attention (p. 213). She also suggests that the ambiguities of popular culture point to unresolved social problems of the Third Reich. And although the National Socialists tried to appropriate cinema and its female stars as mass medium for its philosophy, they could only succeed in a highly contradictory manner.

Koepnick's theoretically and politically incisive study explores the complex relationship between the Third Reich cinema and Hollywood. His study is immediately appealing, with its elegantly symmetrical contents: 'Hollywood in Berlin 1933–1939' (how German directors appropriated Hollywood conventions to ensure popular appeal) and 'Berlin in Hollywood, 1939–1955' (how the large scale emigration of German cinema talent to America impacted on Hollywood production). Indeed, the entire study is conceived in terms of mirroring, doubling and splits to demonstrate how German cinema has always been one 'of cultural transfers and transcultural fusions' (p. 2). Amongst all the authors here reviewed, Koepnick's approach is most indebted to the cultural criticism and pessimism of the Frankfurt School's culture industry thesis and Fredric Jameson's notion of structural causality.¹¹ He turns to Adorno's dialectical understanding of modern culture to help evaluate the period's 'political dimensions of industrial mass culture' (p. 9), and he discusses the Wagnerian legacy as a third

¹⁰ Her films with Detlef Sierck (Douglas Sirk), *Zu neuen Ufern/To New Shores* (1937), and *La Habanera* (1937), illustrate this tension.

¹¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London: Methuen, 1981).

12 A common German language had been crucial in enabling the creation of nation-state in the nineteenth century.

structural component in the relationship between Hollywood and Nazi Germany (p. 9). To support these broad theses Koepnick provides compelling detailed analyses of a range of films, directors, stars and sound technologies: he is, for example, the only author to foreground the centrality of sound in meaning production, writing eloquently about the significance of sound to the National Socialist project¹² to 'orchestrate collective fantasy and capture the national imagination' (p. 11).

Koepnick's exemplary chapter on Leander is revealing. In contrast to Ascheid's conception of Leander as a contradictory figure who exceeds the demands of the dominant ideology, Koepnick argues equally persuasively that Leander's popularity demonstrates how 'mass culture from above' and commodification of utopian desires are engendered by this star. For Koepnick, heterogeneity was integral to the Nazi culture and not merely a symptom – it offered false dreams of individual freedom (Adorno's notion of 'pseudoindividualization'). 'Leander's star persona ... constituted a site which Nazi society negotiated ideologically unstable relations informing gender identity, modes of spectatorship, the location of mass culture in fascism, and the meaning of German identity' (p. 76). New technology enabled Leander to become an audiovisual star (she also was a radio personality), and thanks to synchronized sound the star's charisma could be further enhanced; now sonic closeness could compensate for the loss of spectacularization associated with the Weimar period.

In opposition to Ascheid's approach to culture as a relative autonomous structure, Koepnick still seems to have an investment in the Marxist notion that the superstructure emerges from the base, and he has no allegiance to the cultural studies approach which all too readily wants to assign subversive meanings to popular cultural icons such as Leander (p. 86). For him, her 'star persona documents the extent to which the Nazi culture industry captured emotions not in recourse to the use value of ideology but the mysticism of cultural commodities and consumption' (p. 80). While some may find Koepnick's book too densely theoretical, even obfuscating at times, in my view there is ample reward in the nuanced readings of films and stars situated in complex sociopolitical and historical determinants. This theoretical and most rigorous book has the makings of a classic, albeit a contested one.

Of all the material under review, Ascheid and Koepnick in particular offer the reader sophisticated insights into the possibilities of a New German Film History. Their respective books, demonstrate also that ideological notions of the popular are significantly dependent on which paradigms are activated or negotiated. Whereas Ascheid reassesses popular icons, the stars from within the dominant tendency of cultural studies, Koepnick engages with these only to redefine his cultural-theoretical approach via the *bête noir* of cultural studies, namely Adorno. In the end the readers' own theoretical allegiances will

determine which approach they find more convincing, which in turn illustrates the new pluralism rather than the old certainties of formalist, psychoanalytic master paradigms.

Most of the scholars who explore popular cinema as a symptom of the broader culture are located within German departments in US universities. When a new generation of academics from this background turns to film to understand the containing and enabling culture rather than to understand the films themselves as aesthetic artefacts, the results are bound to be interesting for cultural historians, and indeed the anthology offers some tantalizing sociopolitical insights. By foregrounding audience preferences rather than endorsing canonical choices, marginal and ignored areas are put on the agenda which in turn may provoke revisions of accepted 'knowledge'.

However, when surveying these revisionist studies, I sometimes have to suppress a lingering nostalgia for the cerebral play of abstraction and speculation, and yet more often I miss the sheer joy invoked by discussing film as film. I freely admit that cultural studies approaches to cinema produces considerable insights as to the sociohistorical forces that produced films and their reception, but from a film studies background, more often than not the New German Film History to me has little to say about the elusive hedonistic pleasures of cinephilia. The above selection indicates that recent trends in German Film History privilege popular cinema and strive for more concrete sociological knowledge by employing the theoretical tools of cultural studies, and as such they avoid the pitfalls of value judgments, but arguably they also forgo the delights of aesthetic cine-passions.

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